

The Source of Real Happiness

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[0 : 00] But as always, we have at the center of our services studying and listening to the Word of God. And so we're going to turn together now to Psalm 32. Last week we were in Psalm 121. This morning, Paul Brennan is going to be opening up this psalm to us. And it's a very great psalm indeed, full of great encouragement, but also a real challenge. And we'll read together. If you have a Bible, do pick it up and follow along with us. Psalm 32, a maskele, that's probably some sort of musical terminology about the song, a maskele of David. Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. For 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 dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord. And you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Therefore, let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found. Surely in the rush of great waters they shall not reach him. You are a hiding place for me.

You preserve me from trouble. You surround me with shouts of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you in the ways you should go. I'll cancel you with my eye upon you.

Be not like a horse or a mule without understanding. You must be curbed with a bit and a bridle, or it won't stay near to you. Many are the sorrows of the wicked.

But steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous. Shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

[2 : 22] Amen. May God bless to us his word. Well, good morning to you, and please do turn to Psalm 32 in your Bibles.

It would be good to have that open, which Willie was reading for us earlier. If you've got small people in the house, now's the time to stick in front of Netflix, get them distracted, and you can listen in without distraction. So I encourage you to do that now.

But please do have Psalm 32 open. Now, this psalm gives us the answer to the question that lurks in all of our hearts, in my heart and in yours. What is the key to happiness? Where do we find true happiness?

The pursuit of happiness is the basis upon which the entire advertising industry is based upon. We're enticed to buy this car or that toaster or these new jeans that dangled in front of us with the promise of greater happiness.

And happiness, the seeking of it, absolutely fascinates us. It consumes our thoughts, our time, our energy. And the pursuit of happiness is enshrined, isn't it, in the Declaration of Human Independence in the United States.

[3 : 46] It's right there in that document, the pursuit of happiness. I was just reading this week that one of the most popular courses at Yale University is one all about happiness.

It's the psychology and the good life. And the professor behind it, she was observing in the university there in Yale huge and rising rates of anxiety.

Depression had doubled in 10 years amongst the students. And so she wanted to do something about it. So she started this course, which is really all about happiness. And she thought she might get 30 students, but actually over 1,000 enrolled.

It was, in fact, the most popular course in all of Yale's history. It's since gone online for free. Over 2 million people have taken that course. It's now a popular podcast as well.

Happiness. Even the brightest students there in the States, they are eager and desperate to find out more. In fact, one of the most viewed TED Talks of all time, it's been watched almost 18 million times, has this title, What Makes the Good Life?

[5 : 01] Lessons from the Longest Study on Happiness. Now, the man giving that talk is the director of an 80-year-long study into what contributes to general well-being and happiness.

It's a study based at Harvard. And they discovered a lot of things through that 80 years, tracking these men through their lives. But the essence of it, the study boils down to this.

The answer to happiness is not money or fame, but good relationships. That is the absolutely key foundation to happiness, according to this study.

And what they observe is that happiness actually comes from the things that we sacrifice in order to get the things that we think will give us happiness, but actually don't, according to that study.

Now, that finding should not surprise the Christian. You see, the Bible is interested in the happiness of people. And at the very root of the Bible's answer is good relationships.

[6 : 09] And of one relationship in particular. The root of happiness, true contentment, true well-being, says the Bible, is the restored relationship between you and the God who made you.

That is the key to true and lasting happiness, according to the Bible. That is at the very heart of the Christian religion. It is not primarily about intellectual endeavor, although we certainly don't leave our brains at the door, but it is above all relational, and about the restoration of relationship.

It's about us, people like you and me, truly knowing our Creator, having the barriers removed so that that relationship can be. That's the very core of what the Bible teaches.

And so that TED Talk I mentioned just a moment ago, it was right. That study at Harvard is right, but only up to a point, because it ignores the fundamental relationship, the relationship between the Creator and His creation.

And it's that, that relationship that our psalm addresses. It's about the happy, blessed believer. And it points to the true source of happiness, which is the restoration of a relationship that is broken.

[7 : 32] But the foundation of that happiness that our psalm points us to, perhaps surprises us, because this, at heart, is a psalm all about repentance, confession, that action of showing, and showing real sorrow and regret for having done something wrong.

There in verse 5, we have the very essence of what repentance is, and it's profoundly relational. Look at verse 5 there.

David writes, I acknowledge my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

You see, this confession of sin there in verse 5, it is the means by which men and women are led afresh into real joy of the Lord.

It's the place where they find true happiness. It's right there in the very first verse, isn't it? Blessed, or happy, is the one whose transgression is forgiven. It's the blessing of belonging to the Lord when once we were alienated.

[8 : 45] David's message, the writer of the psalm, his message is that real happiness is found in sins forgiven.

True contentment, true well-being for now and all eternity. This is where it's found. And that cannot happen without confession.

That's at the heart of our psalm this morning. So let's look more closely at David's psalm. It falls into two sections. First, verses 1 to 5, we see David's testimony, and that leads him on to verse 6 to 11, to his teaching.

David's testimony leads to his teaching. His personal experience, well, it leads him to burst out with this passionate plea. So let's look at these first few verses, 1 to 5.

We see David's testimony, his personal experience. And verses 1 and 2, he knows the joy of sins forgiven.

[9 : 44] Look at verses 1 and 2 there. Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity.

See, David is emphatic here, isn't he? With his description of the man whose transgression is forgiven. He describes such a man as blessed or happy, has complete wellness of being.

Happy and fortunate because he fully realizes the plight from which he's been rescued. You see, unless we see the real horror and despair and darkness of sin, then we'll never realize or appreciate why a man is considered blessed when he's been forgiven his sin.

Unless you see the depths of it, the darkness of it, we'll never see why such joy comes when we're forgiven. Just listen to the story of someone who's been rescued from almost certain death, and you'll hear a man with real gratitude in his heart, won't you?

And that is what David is like. He's seen the darkness of his sin. He knows what he's been rescued from. And three words he uses here, which illuminate for us the true state of the unforgiven man.

[11 : 03] Three words in these first two verses, transgression, sin, and iniquity. So he says, blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, verse one.

And that word transgression, it's a deliberate wandering away from the Lord. It's a deliberate rebellion. Knowing full well what the Lord demands of us, we walk defiantly in our own way, denying his rightful rule over our lives.

Transgression. He also talks about sin there, end of verse one. And that word carries with it this idea of sort of falling short, missing the mark.

It's like an arrow aimed at a target, which falls miserably short, far short. And that's what we're like. We fall far short of our own standards, let alone God's.

Sin. And then there's iniquity. There in verse two. And iniquity is really a sort of fundamental crookedness of character, a very twistedness in our very being.

[12 : 11] Now, suppose most of us don't really think of ourselves as crooked, deliberately rebellious, twisted people.

But the thing is, God says that we are. Sin is a grave problem. It's a real affront to the Lord. We need our sin to be utterly removed from it. It's that serious.

It's got to be totally removed, not just explained away, not just overlooked, but rather totally forgiven, utterly removed. But how is that possible?

We'll look again at the first bit of verse two. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity. You see, it's what God himself reckons that really matters, not us.

And according to God, when we confess our sin, the Lord forgives us because he does not count our sin against us. And the New Testament shows us how this can be possible.

[13 : 18] It's possible through the cross of Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians chapter five, Paul says, For our sake, he made him to be sin.

That is, Jesus. He made Jesus to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

You see, because of the cross, God counts the righteousness of Jesus to the believer. And the sin of the believer is counted to Jesus on the cross.

Do you see what's happened there? There's a great reversal, a great substitution. God's righteousness in Jesus is counted to me, and my sin is counted to him.

It's almost unbelievable, isn't it? That my sin is put to Jesus' account. That his perfect obedience is put to my account. It's extraordinary, isn't it?

[14 : 21] But the Old Testament message isn't any different. The Bible is at one on this issue of the forgiveness of sin. You see, David knew that confession led to forgiveness.

This is the very first and primary thing that we must do. There is no other way to be truly happy. There's no other way to the truly blessed life, the life of being counted righteous, forgiven, before our Creator and Father.

Unforgiven transgression, well, that bars the way to the Lord, doesn't it? Which is why David is able to say, the blessed man is the forgiven man.

The forgiven man enjoys this relationship with the God who made him, this real belonging to him. And that is what David has come to know.

That's the first element of his testimony. It's the joy of forgiveness. And how he came to know and enjoy this forgiveness, we'll see in a few moments in verse 5. But before we get there, we must experience and see verses 3 and 4.

[15 : 32] Just look down there at those verses. David knows the joy of forgiveness, but he's also known the pain of stubborn refusal. You see, David's confession in verse 5, it wasn't immediate, was it?

For a time, he said nothing, refusing to turn to the Lord in repentance. Look at verses 3 and 4. He reflects on how things were before he faced up to his sin and confessed it.

And David's delay in confessing his sin did not go well for him, did it? His time of silence led only to despair and misery.

Look at what he says there, verse 3. When I kept silence, my bones wasted away, groaning all day long. His unconfessed sin, it weighed him down, gnawing away at his very being.

He was unable to forget about it, unable to let it go. All day long, it was like a millstone around his neck. His strength, he says, was dried up as by the heat of summer.

[16 : 42] Requires a bit of a stretch for the imagination, doesn't it, for the average Glaswegian to imagine that heat of summer. Perhaps more helpful to imagine walking into a house where the central heating is cranked up to tropical temperatures.

It's just life-stopping, isn't it? You can barely maintain focus to keep the conversation going. You just sort of droop, don't you? And that's how David describes this result of his unconfessed sin.

His strength was dried up. He literally felt it. His body was weary. Quite the contrast, isn't it, to the blessedness he speaks about in verse 1.

And the source of his pain and anguish is perhaps surprising. Look again at the first part of verse 4. He says, For day and night, your hand was heavy upon me.

You see, it's the Lord's heavy hand convicting him that brings David to this low ebb. It's the Lord who's doing it, but it's a merciful and gracious heavy hand.

[17 : 51] Why? Well, because his misery, it actually drove him to confession, didn't it, in verse 5. And sometimes the Lord must bring us to moments like this when the weight of our sin just seems unbearable.

Perhaps you're looking back on things done and said maybe many years ago with a heavy heart. You can't possibly begin to imagine knowing happiness when you've made such a real mess of things.

You look back with regret. You don't think you can bear it. Well, the Lord sometimes does bring us in his grace to a real low point, a point where we see our sin for what it really is, so that we have to seek him.

Maybe this is you who've been brought to the point of misery, the reality of the disastrous consequences of your own selfish actions. You just can't escape them.

You can't sleep. You can't think. You know you've really messed up. The question haunts you. how can I ever get up from this?

[19 : 04] And it's misery for you. It's real misery. But if so, let me tell you it is a merciful misery. It may not feel like it.

But it is because the Lord is driving you to confession. That is the only path to forgiveness. The most dangerous place to be is where you don't feel the pain of your sin.

You don't see or feel the seriousness of it. That is a dangerous place to be. Far better to feel it than you're moved to do something about it. You see, the misery of sin, it can be a gift from God.

It's his refusal to allow you to be comfortable and happy in your sin. And that is ultimately a mercy because it drives us, it drives you to seek forgiveness in the only place where it can be found.

So how can you, how can anyone know the Lord's forgiveness? How can we know this joy, this happiness that David speaks about there in verse 1? If the Bible claims that we have the absolute source of true contentment and happiness, where is it?

[20 : 21] Where do we find it? well, it's not in that course at Yale. It's here. Verse 5.

That's the key. That is where your road to recovery begins. We see in verse 5 that David knows the necessity of confession.

after the groaning silence of verses 3 and 4, all of a sudden the outpouring of confession there in verse 5. Look at what he says.

He says, I acknowledged my sin to you and you did, I did not cover my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

This, this is the key to the truly happy life in all its fullness. So this is for you. If you've never before confessed your sin, you wonder, how can I do it?

[21 : 26] How can I be made right with God? Well, here it is. Three simple things to note in verse 5. First, we need to acknowledge our sin.

before confession can take place, there's got to be acknowledgement of our own sin. You see, David was utterly eaten up, wasn't he, by his refusal to face up to his sin.

He let the guilt fester away until he got to the point where he just had to acknowledge it. He couldn't do anything else. You perhaps know that feeling. And so we must acknowledge our sin.

It's fundamental that we come to this point. And it's not just the consequences of the sin that need to be confessed and acknowledged. No, look at the end of verse 5.

You get the slightly curious phrase. David writes, the Lord forgave the iniquity of my sin. It doesn't just say the Lord forgave my sin, but rather the iniquity of my sin.

[22 : 26] It's the sinfulness of our sin, the very twistedness of it that needs to be acknowledged and confessed. We're to be sorry for the sin itself, not merely the consequences, not simply because we've been caught out.

You see, our sin is primarily an assault on the Lord's rule over the world, over my life. And so we must come to the point of acknowledging our sin in all its fullness, our very rottenness to our core.

You see, without acknowledging it, without coming to terms with it, we cannot begin to confess it. So whether it's the spiteful words spoken to our closest family, whether it's some secret, but fundamentally destructive desire that nobody else knows about, whatever it is, we need to confess the iniquity of our sin.

How at its core it's an affront to our creator God, a rejection of his right rule. So the question is, have you, have you made an accurate self-assessment of your own life and heart?

Have you acknowledged that sin? And that is, I think, what David means at the end of verse 2. Just look back to that where he says, in whose spirit there is no deceit.

[23 : 57] You see, we are to be truthful with ourselves, ourselves, and with God, about our true state. No cover-up, no deceit, no smoothing over the reality, just frank honesty about the reality of our sin.

So we must acknowledge it, we must realize it ourselves before we can confess it. That's the first thing. But it's not just mere acknowledgement, is it? We must confess it. That's the second thing David tells us in this verse.

We need to confess. Our sin. Well, to whom do we confess? Well, it's to the Lord, isn't it? Look at the second half of verse 5. I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.

He is our first port of call, isn't it, when it comes to confessing our sin, not some other human being. No, it's the Lord. And David knows that confession leads to forgiveness.

confession is the only path to true blessedness, true happiness. And so we must confess. We must confess our sin to the Lord.

[25 : 09] Well, how do you do that? Maybe you're watching this. You've never before confessed your sin to anyone or to the Lord.

How do you do it? Well, you might say something like this. Lord, I can hardly imagine what it's like to create and sustain someone and then be ignored by them day in, day out, to have promises broken, to have them live just how they like.

Lord, I'm sorry for how I lived, thought, and spoken without a second thought for you. Please forgive me for my sin, remove my guilt for Jesus' sake.

So you might confess in that way. No hiding away, no deceit, just honesty, reality. But it's not only acknowledgement and confession.

The third thing we must do is receive. We must receive forgiveness of sin. You see, the link there between the confession and the forgiveness is seamless.

[26 : 26] It's immediate, isn't it? I said I will confess my transgression to the Lord and you forgave. The Lord's forgiveness is definite and immediate. There's no doubting it. How's that possible?

How can the Lord do that? Well, as we've already considered, the Lord wonderfully does not count sin against the believer. For those who trust in him, those who confess, it is instead counted against the Lord Jesus Christ.

When the Lord looks at me, he doesn't see any sin. It's counted the Lord Jesus Christ. It's done. But that poses a big question, doesn't it?

Do we, do you, have the humility to receive from another something that we can never do for ourselves? You see, proud hearts cannot receive gifts easily, least of all the gift of forgiveness.

But you see, humble acknowledgement, humble confession, that's the only path to receive forgiveness of sins. And David knew this. It was his own experience.

[27 : 38] And it's the very first and primary thing that we must do. There's no other way to the truly happy, blessed life than this. This is David's personal testimony.

From the great despair in verses three and four, comes the acknowledgement of the darkness of sin in verse five and confession to the Lord, which brings that wonderful life-transforming forgiveness, how we can burst out in verses one and two of that blessedness of knowing forgiveness.

That's the very heart, isn't it, of David's experience. Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. That great barrier between man and God is removed.

It's no longer there. Gone. Well, from David's profound personal experience there in verses one to five comes his great passionate plea there from verse six.

he can't help, can he, but move from testimony to teaching. He's saying, look, here's what happened to me, here's what I did, now do as I did, but do it much quicker, don't hang about.

[28 : 54] David longs for all who are listening to this this morning to know the same forgiveness that he's known, to know the same joy, the same blessedness. Do as I did, says David.

So three things as we conclude. First, verse six, we know the necessity of confession, therefore confess today, says David.

Do you hear the urgency of his plea there in verse six? He says, therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found. Surely in the rush of great waters they shall not reach him.

Offer prayer to the Lord at a time when he can be found. Do it now, today. Don't wait as David did. Learn the lessons he shared in verses three and four about the misery of living with unconfessed guilt.

That's no way to live. So heed David's warning. Confess. Confess today. Confess whilst the Lord may be found.

[30 : 05] That's David's first plea. Second, verses seven to nine, we know the pain of stubborn refusal. We've seen that. Therefore, says David, remember the benefits of the forgiven.

There's each contrast here between the misery of verses three and four, and David outlines here the wonderful benefits of living as one who is forgiven. Look at verse seven, the forgiven man knows what it is to live under the Lord's protection.

He is our hiding place, keeping us from trouble. He surrounds us with shouts of deliverance. What a turnaround from the groaning of verse three.

But not only does the forgiven man enjoy the Lord's protection, but he sits under the Lord's instruction. Notice, you get a bit of a change of speaker there in verse eight.

It's the Lord who speaks now. He says, I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will counsel you with my eye upon you. You see, the great privilege of the blessed man, the forgiven man, is to sit gladly under the Lord's instruction.

[31 : 20] He says, don't, verse nine, don't be like a horse or a mule without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle or will not stay near to you. Don't be like that.

Don't be like a stubborn mule without understanding, constantly needing to be yanked back and pulled on track. It's not a very flattering comparison, is it? Don't be like a mule.

Don't be like I was in verses three and four, stubbornly refusing to repent, remaining in misery. Don't be like that. Learn from my mistakes. Don't make it necessary for God to turn up the heat on you, to make you really miserable before you will confess your sin.

Don't let it get that far, says David. Listen to me. Turn to the Lord now and know the wonderful benefits of being one of the Lord's people.

It is a wonderful thing to be able to live under the instruction of the Lord who made you. He knows his world, he knows you, and he has wonderful things to teach you.

[32 : 26] the forgiven man. He's a fool, isn't he, if he turns away from this instruction. So know the benefits of being one of the Lord's people.

And then third, verses 10 and 11. David says we can know the joy of forgiven sin, therefore rejoice.

the psalm closes on this wonderful note of praise and joy. David reminds us of the sheer wonder, the sheer attractiveness of the gospel of grace, the God of grace.

And those that turn to him in repentance, anyone who turns to him, even you today, he will not turn away. If you confess today, he will welcome you in.

He delights to forgive. And what joy it is to know that our sin is no longer counted against us. And so if you know the joy of the forgiveness of sin, if you're listening to this this morning, and you know what it is to be forgiven, then be glad, rejoice.

[33 : 40] Let us shout for joy. That is what it is to be happy and blessed. This is the true source of real happiness. If you're a Christian that's not found in other things, not found in wealth, property, cars, it's found here in this relationship which has been restored.

So if you know that, forgiveness rejoice. But if you've not known the joy of the forgiveness of sin, then don't delay.

Hear David's message this morning. It is in forgiveness alone that true blessings are found. not blessed is the one who gets a promotion at work, good that that might be.

Not blessed is the one who earns the most money. Not blessed are those who are no longer in lockdown, although that will be a huge relief and joy, won't it? These things in and of themselves are not bad, but the root to happiness is not found in them.

They will in the end only disappoint. true happiness, true blessedness, true fulfillment is found only in the forgiveness of sin, acceptance, welcoming by the God who made you.

[35 : 02] Verse 10 sets out the contrast so vividly for us. We'll finish with these words. David says, many are the sorrows of the wicked.

That is those who refuse to repent. Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord.

You see, for those who refuse to repent of their sin, those who refuse to turn away from their sin and turn to the Lord, there is only in the end sorrow.

David is quite clear, isn't he? sin. But what a glorious contrast for those who trust in the Lord for their forgiveness. Steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord.

That is a wonderful thing. There is nothing better in this life and for all eternity than to be known by the Lord. No barrier. It's gone. Sin forgiven. the Lord and you with nothing in between.

[36 : 11] That is true happiness. That is true joy according to Psalm 32, according to the Bible. Well, let me pray and then we'll sing our final hymn.

Let's pray. Father God, we do thank you. that you are a God who does care for each and any one of us.

You do care for our true happiness, not just here but for all eternity. And true happiness is found only in knowing you, in having our sin forgiven.

So Lord, please help each one of us not to delay, not to wallow in our guilts, but rather turn to you. So please would you help us, help each one of us to turn, to acknowledge, to confess our sin to you, and so know that real joy.

Help us, we ask. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.