

# The Pursuit of Happiness

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- [ 0 : 00 ] If you have Bibles, perhaps you'd like to pick them up and turn, if you would, to Psalm number 32. Psalm number 32. I'm not sure what number it is in the church Bible. Somebody sing out, would you?
- Oh, it's on the screen. There we are. 462. If you have one of our church Bibles. And we're going to read together Psalm number 32.
- A masculine 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.
- But 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.
- [ 1 : 22 ] 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're 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 way you should go. I'll counsel you with my eye upon you.
- Be not like a horse or mule without understanding, which must be curbed with bit, bridle, or it will not stay near 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, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.
- Amen. May God bless to us his word. Well, a very good morning. It would be great if you were able to turn with me to Psalm 32, which we'll be thinking about for the next few moments.
- [ 2 : 28 ] So please do have that open in front of you. The United States Declaration of Independence, the founding document of that nation, reads like this.
- Don't worry, I'm not going to read the whole thing, just a little section. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
- The pursuit of happiness. That's what we're all after, isn't it, in 2014 as we look ahead? Happiness.
- That's what our work colleagues are after, our families too. It's what parents want for their children. But what do we mean by that? What does the world mean by that?
- Happiness. I wonder how the world might finish the very first line of our psalm. Blessed or happy or fortunate, it could be translated.
- [ 3 : 44 ] Blessed is the one who... How would the world finish that line? The usual suspects might be more stuff, more friends, a better job, more money.

I remember reading not too long ago about the latest thinking in David Cameron's behavioral insights team there at number 10. And their thinking amounted to this.

Money can buy happiness. You just have to spend it wisely. We can spend a lot of time and efforts pursuing happiness, can't we?

Is it really attainable? Can we truly attain happiness? Well, our psalm this morning is all about happiness. You see, the Bible is interested in the happiness of the Lord's people.

And our psalm is about the happy or blessed believer. However, our psalm points to the true source of happiness. And this is perhaps surprising because this psalm is all about penitence.

[ 4 : 5 6 ] It is one of the seven so-called penitential psalms. Another well-known one is Psalm 51. What on earth is penitence? Well, it means repentance or confession.

The action of showing sorrow and regret for having done something wrong. There in verse 5, we have the very essence of what repentance is. I acknowledge my sin to you and did not cover my iniquity.

I said I will confess my transgressions to the Lord. And you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Now, hold on just a moment.

I thought you said this psalm was all about happiness. Well, it is. Notice the tone of the psalm. Verse 1, blessed. Verse 2, blessed.

Look down to verse 11. Glad, rejoice. Joy, outpourings of praise run through this psalm.

[ 6 : 0 0 ] And yet, at its core lies confession. You see, this confession of sin, verse 5, is the means by which men and women are led afresh into the joy of the Lord.

It's right there in the very first verse. Blessed or happy is the one whose transgression is forgiven. It's the blessing of belonging to the Lord when once we were alienated.

David's message is that real happiness is found in sins forgiven. And that can't happen without confession.

That is at the very heart of our psalm this morning. So let's look more closely at David's psalm. It falls into two sections. David's testimony in verses 1 to 5.

David's testimony. And then David's teaching, 6 to 11. You see, David's personal experience leads him to burst out with passionate exhortation in the second half of the psalm.

[ 7 : 0 6 ] So let's firstly look at David's personal experience. Verses 1 to 5. You see, David, he knows the joy of sins forgiven.

Verses 1 and 2. He knows the joy of sins forgiven. Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven. Whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts.

No iniquity. David is emphatic here with the description of the man whose transgression is forgiven. He describes such a man as blessed.

Such a man, in other words, is happy. Has complete wellness of being. Happy and fortunate because such a man fully realizes the plight from which he has been rescued.

That is the source of true happiness. And there are three words here which illustrate for us and illuminate the true state of the unforgiven man.

[ 8 : 1 1 ] Three words. Transgression. Sin. And iniquity. They're all there in verses 1 and 2. Transgression.

It's a deliberate wandering away from the Lord. A deliberate rebellion. Knowing full well what the Lord demands of us. We walk defiantly in our own way.

We deny the rightful ruler of our own lives. Transgression. Then David mentions sin. And the word carries with it the idea of missing a mark.

Falling short. It's like an arrow aimed at a target. But the arrow falls miserably short. Far, far short.

And so it is with man who falls far, far short of God's perfect holy standards. Sin. And then there's iniquity.

[ 9 : 09 ] It's a fundamental crookedness of character. A twistedness of being. Now I suppose that most of us don't think of ourselves as crooked, deliberately rebellious, twisted people, do we?

But the problem is, God says that we are. God says that we are. All this, transgression, sin, iniquity, whatever we think, it is directed towards our creator.

Towards the rightful ruler of our lives. Sin is a grave problem and an affront to the Lord. We need our sin to be utterly removed from us.

Not just explained away. Not just overlooked. But rather forgiven. Totally. Utterly removed.

Because sin has a penalty. We need to be forgiven. How is that possible? How can we be forgiven such things?

[ 10 : 19 ] Well, look again at the first half of verse 2. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity.

It's what the Lord himself reckons that matters, not us. And according to God, when we confess sin, the Lord forgives us because he does not count our sin against us.

He doesn't count our sin against us. Now, the New Testament tells us that this can be possible. It's possible through the cross of Christ. In 2 Corinthians chapter 5, Paul says, For our sake, for our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Because of the cross, God counts the righteousness of Jesus to the believer. Because the sin of the believer was counted to Jesus on the cross.

But the Old Testament message isn't any different. The Bible is at one on the issue of the forgiveness of sins. David knew that confession led to forgiveness.

[ 11 : 37 ] That is the very first and primary thing that we must do. There is no other way to the truly blessed, happy life.

The life of being counted righteous, forgiven, before our Creator and Father. Unforgiven transgression bars the way to the Lord.

We can't overcome it. Which is why David is able to say that the blessed man, the happy man, is the forgiven man. The forgiven man enjoys relationship and belonging with the Lord.

That is the first element of David's testimony. It's the joy of forgiveness. He knows all those things, those transgressions, those sins, those iniquities, have not been counted against him.

They've been forgiven. That is true joy. And David knows that. How he came to know and enjoy this forgiveness through confession we'll see in a few moments in verse 5.

[ 12 : 45 ] But before we get there, we have to consider verses 3 and 4. And in these verses we see that David knows the perils of stubborn refusal.

David knows the perils of stubborn refusal. David's confession that we see in verse 5 was not immediate. For a time he said nothing, refusing to turn to the Lord in repentance.

Let's look again at verses 3 and 4. David's delay in confessing his sin did not go well for him.

His time of silence led only to misery and disaster. My bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. His unconfessed sin weighed him down, gnawing away at his very being.

He was unable to forget about it, unable to let it go. It was like a millstone around his neck. His strength dried up as in the heat of summer.

[ 14 : 06 ] Now this requires a slight stretch in the imagination for the average Glaswegian. It's not too often that we are faced with extreme heat in the middle of summer.

But perhaps you've been away on holiday to a hot country. And if you head out in the middle of the day when the sun is at its peak and you try to do anything, you very quickly become tired, thirsty, drained, low in energy.

All you want to do is sit in the shade and sip a nice cool lemonade. But this is how David describes the results of his unconfessed sin. His strength is dried up.

Quite a contrast to the blessedness we see in verse 1, isn't it? And the source of his pain and anguish is perhaps surprising. Look again at the first part of verse 4.

For day and night your heavy hand was upon me. It's the Lord's heavy hand upon David convicting him that brings him to this low ebb.

[ 15 : 19 ] Why? Because his misery drove him to confession in verse 5. That's why it's a merciful heavy hand.

Sometimes the Lord must bring us to moments like this, where the weight of our sins just seems unbearable. Perhaps the Lord has his merciful heavy hand upon you.

You're being led to the point where you cannot do anything but turn to him. You see, the weight of sin is unbearable. We can't bear it. Which is why we must turn to the Lord and turn to him in confession.

That is the only path to forgiveness. And the Lord sometimes, in his grace, brings us to a real low point. A point where we see our sin for what it really is.

So that we seek him. And we see this in other areas of life, don't we? A merciful sorrow leads us to seek out a solution. An aching tooth causes us much pain, doesn't it?

[ 16 : 30 ] But the pain alerts us to the fact that something must be done. We need to get to the dentist. Even though it's the last thing we'd want to do.

An aching tooth leads us to go to the dentist, get the problem sorted. Ignoring the toothache is not a good idea. It's a merciful pain. Because it leads us to get help.

To seek out a solution. And so it is with the Lord sometimes for us. Maybe this is you. At the end of this year.

You've been brought to the point of misery. The reality of the disastrous consequences of your selfish actions. You just cannot escape them.

You can't sleep. You can't think straight. You know you've screwed up. The question haunts you. How can I ever get up from this?

[ 17 : 31 ] It is misery for you. 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 us. Driving you to confession. That is the only path to forgiveness. So how can you, how can the rest of us know the Lord's forgiveness?

How can we know this joy, this happiness that David speaks about in verse 1? Well, the key is there in verse 5. That is where your road to recovery begins. You see, David knows the necessity of confession.

David knows the necessity of confession, verse 5. After all that groaning silence in verses 3 and 4, all of a sudden, the outpouring of confession in verse 5.

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

[ 18 : 36 ] Three simple things to note in verse 5. We need to acknowledge our sin. We need to confess our sin.

We need to receive forgiveness of our sin. Three things. So first, we need to acknowledge our sin. Before confession can take place, there must be acknowledgement of sin.

David was eaten up by his refusal to face up to his sin in verses 3 and 4. He let the guilt fester until he got to the point where he couldn't do anything but acknowledge it.

You know that feeling. 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 needs to be acknowledged.

Look carefully at the end of verse 5 where there's a slightly curious phrase. David writes that the Lord forgave the iniquity of my sin. It doesn't just say the Lord forgave my sin.

[ 19 : 47 ] But rather the iniquity of my sin. You see, it's the sinfulness of our sin that needs to be acknowledged and confessed. We need to be sorry for the sin itself.

Not simply its 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 and over my life.

And so we must come to the point of acknowledging our sin in all its fullness. And that's our rottenness to the very core of our being. That is sobering, isn't it?

It's painful. But we must come to that point. The point of seeing ourselves as we really are. The iniquity of our sin. Our absolute corruption to the core.

Without coming to this point, we can make no claim on the blessed life. Without acknowledging our sin, we cannot begin to confess our sin.

[ 20 : 48 ] So whether it's the spiteful words we aim at our closest family, whether it's some secret but fundamentally destructive pleasure that no one else knows about, whether it's envy or anger or selfishness, 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 rightful rule over us. So have you made an accurate self-assessment of your own life and heart?

Is God's word being held up as a mirror to your life, to your heart? Have you acknowledged that sin? That's the first thing to note.

We need to acknowledge the sin. Then we need to confess the sin. Secondly, David confesses. Following acknowledgement, we speak. We confess our sin.

To whom? Well, it's to the Lord. Look at the second half of verse 5. I will confess my transgression to the Lord. He is our first port of call when it comes to confession of sin, not some other human being.

[ 22 : 09 ] David knows that confession leads to forgiveness. Confession is the only path to true blessedness, true happiness. So we confess.

How? Well, you might want to say something like this to the Lord. 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've lived, thought, spoken without a second thought for you.

Please forgive me. Perhaps you might want to use the words of Psalm 51, that great psalm of repentance. I'll not read it, but you can look it up later.

Use those words of David as your own confession, as you speak to the Lord. So we acknowledge our sin. We confess it.

- [ 23 : 16 ] But thirdly, we need to receive forgiveness of sin. The link between confession and forgiveness is seamless and 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. How is that possible?
- Well, as we've already considered, the Lord does not count sin against the believer. It is instead counted against the Lord Jesus Christ. It is done.
- It is finished. But this poses a question. Do we have the humility to receive from another something that we cannot do for ourselves?
- Proud hearts can't receive gifts very easily. Least of all, the gift of forgiveness. But humble acknowledgement and humble confession is the only path to receive forgiveness of sins.
- [ 24 : 20 ] David knew this. And it is the very first and primary thing that we must do. There is no other way to the truly happy, blessed life than this.
- So David, he knows the joy of sins forgiven. He knows the perils of stubborn refusal. He knows the necessity of confession.
- This is David's personal testimony. And as one preacher put it, it is a rapturous outburst from a heart that has felt the reality of divine forgiveness.
- It's a wonderful outpouring, isn't it? From the despair of verses 3 and 4 comes the acknowledgement of the darkness of sin in verse 5. And confession to the Lord, which brings that wonderful, life-transforming forgiveness.
- Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is that man. And from this wonderful personal experience in verses 1 to 5, comes David's passionate exhortation in the second half of the psalm, verses 6 to 11.
- [ 25 : 37 ] We see David's teaching here. David can't help but move from testimony to teaching here. Here is the application. In other words, here's the so what question being addressed.
- David's saying, here's what I did. Now you do as I did, but much quicker. Three words of application in these final moments.
- Firstly, we know the necessity of confession. Therefore, confess today, verse 6. Do you sense the urgency of David's plea there in verse 6?
- Offer prayer to the Lord at a time when he can be found. That is, don't wait as David did. Learn the lesson he has shared about the misery of living with unconfessed guilt.
- That is no way to live. But what is it that holds us so often from holding back? What is it that holds us back from confessing?
- [ 26 : 44 ] Well, it's often pride or fear, isn't it? Pride in not wanting to admit we fall short of a standard. Pride in not wanting to admit fault, to lose face, admit our need for forgiveness.
- It is profoundly humiliating to pride, to the self-made man, and renders all religious effort and achievement and status as irrelevant. We fear being exposed for who we really are.
- That's what happened in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve sinned and immediately sought to cover themselves up. But that's futile. We need him to cover us.
- So heed Dave's warning here. Confess. And confess today. Confess whilst the Lord may still be found.
- We need to know the necessity of confession. Therefore, confess today. Second point of application. We know the perils of stubborn refusal.
- [ 27 : 51 ] Therefore, remember the benefits of the forgiven. Verses seven to nine. In contrast to the misery in verses three and four, David here outlines the wonderful benefits of living as one who is forgiven.

The forgiven man lives under the Lord's protection. Verse seven. He is our hiding place, keeping us from trouble. He surrounds us with shouts of deliverance.

What a turnaround from the groaning of verses three. Not only does the forgiven man enjoy the Lord's protection, but he sits under the Lord's instruction.

Notice the change of speaker in verse eight. It's the Lord who speaks now in verse eight. He says, I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

The response of the blessed man is to sit gladly under the Lord's instruction. Don't be like that stubborn mule without understanding. constantly needing to be yanked and pulled back on track.

[ 29 : 05 ] It's a wonderful thing to be able to live under the instruction of the Lord who made you. The forgiven man is a fool if he wanders away from his instruction. It is glorious to live the Christian life, the forgiven life, true blessedness, the Lord's protection, the Lord's instruction.

Third point of application. We can know joy of sin forgiven. Therefore, rejoice.

Rejoice. Verses 10 and 11. The psalm closes on a wonderful note of praise and joy. David reminds us of the sheer wonder, the sheer attractiveness of the gospel of grace, that our sin is not counted against us.

Let those who know the joy of forgiven sin be glad and rejoice. Let us shout for joy. That is where this psalm is leading us. We can know the joy of sin forgiven.

Therefore, rejoice. So as we turn our minds to 2014, as we pursue happiness, remember, blessed is the one in whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

[ 30 : 32 ] not blessed is the one who gets a promotion at work, good though that might be. Not blessed is the one who earns the most money in 2014.

Not blessed is the one who gets that girl he's had his eye on. Although if Willie was preaching, he'd tell you to get a move on. Not blessed is the one who gets the house with the extra bedroom and the jacuzzi.

These things, in and of themselves, are not bad. But the root to happiness is not to be found in them. They will only disappoint.

Yes, they might bring enjoyment for a time. But it won't be long before your eye is on the next promotion, the bigger house, or whatever. True blessedness, true fulfillment, true happiness, true happiness is found only in the forgiveness of sin.

Acceptance by the God who made you. Verse 10 sets out the contrast vividly for us. And we'll finish with this.

[ 31 : 50 ] Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surround the one who trusts in the Lord. For those who refuse to turn from their sin, there is only sorrow.

David is quite clear, isn't he? But what a glorious contrast for those who trust in the Lord for forgiveness. David has learned that true joy, true happiness, is found in knowing that his sin has been totally covered, dealt with, gone.

The Lord and you with nothing in between. That is true happiness. That is true joy.

So pursue that in 2014. Let me pray. Amen. 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. Father, thank you for the wonderful message of this psalm this morning.

[ 33 : 16 ] thank you that true happiness, true contentment is attainable. It is found in the forgiveness of our sin, and the path of that is confession.

So, Father, help us to turn to you, not to walk in our own way, not to stubbornly refuse.  
that leads only to misery.

Help us to turn in confession to you, that we might know the joy, the true blessedness of  
forgiven sin. We ask this in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Amen.