

RESPONDING TO

GOD

WEEK 7:

PSALM 32

In this second **Psalm of the Reordered World**, we revisit ideas we touched on in Psalm 51, about confession and forgiveness. The people of Israel understood the idea of being in a covenant relationship with God. Through the Old Testament, the phrase ‘you will be my people and I will be your God’ repeats. We read of God making and renewing covenants with his people. These were ‘conditional’ covenants – in that the people would be blessed if they obeyed God, but would be punished if they sinned and disobeyed. The Hebrew word for ‘steadfast love’, in Ps 32:10, was integral to that relationship. God’s innate nature should motivate us to be faithful and obedient. (Ex 20:6). In Ps 32, the Psalmist recognised that God has always been committed to a relationship with his people and wants to lavish the blessings of that relationship on us. We are the ones who move away from God when we sin; God wants us to honestly acknowledge and confess our sin, so that our relationship with him is restored.

PRAY: Thanking God for the blessing of being able to be in a relationship with him.

READ: Psalm 32. The passage is printed below from New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Psalm 32: The Joy of Forgiveness. Of David. A Maskil.

¹Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. ²Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. ³While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah. ⁵Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah. ⁶Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them. ⁷You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. Selah. ⁸I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. ⁹Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you. ¹⁰Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD. ¹¹Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

Take a pen and circle the following things in this passage. Share these answers with each other.

- Four ways we disobey God (v1-2)
- Three consequences of not repenting (v3-4)
- Three ways we are honest with God about our sin (v5)
- Three ways God deals with our sin when we repent (v1-2)
- Eight things that God will do when we’re honest with him (v7-8, 10)
- Three benefits of repentance and forgiveness (v11)
- Two (contrasting) ways/ contexts in which the words ‘hide’ and ‘hiding’ are used (v5, 7)
- Two words that Phil can’t give you any definition for. (Intro, v4) ☺

This passage speaks a lot about sin, repentance and forgiveness. One of the benefits of a translation like NRSV, is that it tries to directly translate some words and concepts from Hebrew to English, even though we don’t commonly use some of these words in English. That means we have to work harder to understand the text. But when we understand these concepts, it also helps us understand the enormity of what Jesus has done for us, in his death and resurrection. (Some explanations are provided at the bottom of the next page)

READ: Ps 103: 2-5, 8-12. These verses in Ps 103 highlight that, when we hide from God, we are also running away from the compassion and grace that he wants to lavish on us. In Ps 32, the Psalmist acknowledged that his failure to confess his sin had physically affected him. But he also recognised that, when we experience forgiveness, we also experience the blessing (32:1-2) of being surrounded by God's unfailing love (32:10)

- From the Ps 103 passage, what things about God and his attitude toward you, do you need to remember?

READ: 1 John 1:5-10. The apostle John recognised the need for integrity, especially when confessing our sin. None of us can claim to have no sin in our lives. If we say we have no sin, we practice deceit. God's light must shine into even the darkest places of our lives. The Psalmist(s) acknowledged that our sinfulness cuts to the core of our thoughts, emotions and motivations – and that God can see every part of us.

Happy are those ... in whose spirit there is no deceit (32:2); You desire truth in the inward being/ inner parts (Ps 51:6); Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Ps 139:23-24)

- Do you regularly make time alone with God to intentionally examine your heart and bring unconfessed sin before him? In what ways has God challenged/ convicted you in the past?

"Secrets carry devastating weight, and the anticipation of unburdening oneself from crushing secrets can emotionally overwhelm the spirit."¹

- What do you fear most about 'coming clean' about sin in your life? (the need to change? thinking others might reject you? self-loathing?) Do you need help (and to ask help others) to bring habits, temptations and thought patterns before God and to place them at the foot of the cross?

READ Ps 32:8-9. In Deut 30:19-20, the benefit of choosing life is so that "you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice and hold fast to him." With his relationship with God restored, the Psalmist says that God wants to instruct, teach, counsel and watch over us. God wants to guide his people, both corporately and individually. In Is 11:2-3, Isaiah prophesied that, the promised one (Jesus) would be given the Spirit of the LORD (Yahweh), which is also "the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD." As Jesus prepared to leave this earth, he promised that the Father would send another "Counsellor, the Holy Spirit" who would teach us all things. (Jn 14:26)

- In Ps 32:9, there is a warning to us to not disobey God's voice. How do you, each day, try to discern the voice of God? What spiritual disciplines do you practice? (eg prayer, bible reading, meditation on God's word, silent contemplation, ...) How do they help you maintain your relationship with God and be obedient to his voice?

REFLECT & PRAY: Please respond sensitively to various needs and issues that arise in your group. Break into groups of 2-3 to provide opportunity for confession. Pray for courage, wisdom and obedient hearts in confronting temptation. *Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart! (Ps 32:11)*

Three ways we offend God are: "Transgression" is an act of rebellion and disloyalty; "sin" is an act that misses--often intentionally--God's expressed and revealed will; and "iniquity" is a crooked or wrong act, often associated with a conscious and intentional intent to do wrong.²

Three verbs which express the absoluteness of divine forgiveness: (1) "are forgiven" (lit., "carried away") is the act of removal of sin, guilt, and the remembrance of sin; (2) "are covered" is the gracious act [where] the sinner is reconciled and the sin is a matter of the past, so that the Lord does not bring it up anymore; (3) "does not impute/ count" expresses God's attitude toward those forgiven as "justified."

The apostle Paul and the writer to the Hebrews use the same language and terms that we find in Ps 32, not only about the gravity of our sin, but also the way that Jesus' work on the cross dealt with our ungodly acts. (eg Eph 1:7; Heb 9:22; Rom 4:7-8; Rom 3:25, 5:9; Heb 2:17; Gal 2:15-21) Take time to look these up when you get home.

¹ Dodd, J. (2015). *Survive or thrive: 6 relationships every pastor needs*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook.

² VanGemeren, Willem A. "Psalm 32: The Blessing of Forgiveness and Wise Living" In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Abridged Edition: Old Testament*. 833. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1994.