

**Songs of the Heart:  
IT'S GREAT TO BE FORGIVEN!**

**Psalm 32**

*Making confession and receiving  
forgiveness bring us joy.*

A sermon preached by  
Rev. Dr. William O. (Bud) Reeves  
First United Methodist Church  
Fort Smith, Arkansas  
July 1, 2018

There is a mountain in Scotland called Ben Nevis. It is the highest peak in Great Britain. It is only about 4,500 feet high, not really a world-class mountain, but it's a dangerous peak, snow-capped most of the year. It's a favorite of hikers in Scotland and England, but sudden storms make it perilous, and several people lose their lives on it every year.

In February of 2004, *Trail* magazine, one of the most popular periodicals for climbers and hikers, published directions for the hike to the summit of Ben Nevis. If the weather gets bad, you need specific instructions. The directions for the return from the summit, however, were wrong. If you had followed these instructions, you would have walked off the north face of Ben Nevis, a sheer, 1,000 foot cliff that drops into the Gardyloo Gully.

Immediately seasoned Ben Nevis hikers caught the mistake and alerted the magazine. The editor of *Trail* admitted that they were wrong. A sentence had inadvertently been left out of the article, and they planned to print a correction in the March issue. Meanwhile, they had to hope nobody decided to hike Ben Nevis in February using those instructions.<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes a small error can have disastrous consequences, can't it? A small miscalculation at the beginning can become a big mistake at the end. One step in the wrong direction, and you go over the cliff. A small decision to stray from the pathway of God can lead to the destruction of a life, a home, a family, a soul. My purpose today is to keep you away from that cliff. God wants to keep you from falling or to rescue you if you have.

Remember that one of the themes of the Book of Psalms is instructions on the blessed life. The Psalms are poetry and were used as songs in worship, but they also give us a map of life. They show us how to obtain happiness and joy. They contain a lot of wisdom. In our Psalm today, you can see these wise instructions. At issue is our sin, guilt, and forgiveness. What instructions does this psalm give when we stand on the dangerous precipice of sin?

First, **CONFESS YOUR SIN TO GOD.** That's the simple starting point. We need to let God know we are sorry for our sin. We want to make amends, repair the injury, set things right again. We all need to do this because we are all broken people. Sin is a part of our lives. We are alienated from God and from other people. It's a universal condition. The Bible says, "*all have sinned and fall short of God's glory.*"<sup>2</sup> God knows how we have fallen short, but God needs to know we know how we have fallen short.

The guilt of unconfessed sin is a destructive force in our lives. The longer we hold it in, the more it poisons our soul. Hidden sin can damage our self-esteem, our relationships with loved ones, and our relationship with God. Nearly 3,000 years before the psychologists told us this, the Psalmist knew the truth: "*When I kept quiet, my bones wore out; I was groaning all day long— every day, every night!—because your hand was heavy upon me. My energy was sapped as if in a summer drought.*"<sup>3</sup> Isn't that true to life?

I will never forget a woman in another church who came to me for counseling. She and her husband were very active in the congregation. They had a teenage boy and a little girl in elementary school. They looked like the perfect family. But as soon as she sat down in my office, she began to weep. She told me the story of how she and her husband had dated since high school. But before they got married, she got pregnant. Rather than come clean with their parents, she had an abortion. She and her boyfriend later got married, and they had two beautiful kids. But for twenty years, this woman had been carrying the guilt of a secret sin, and she had never felt the forgiveness of God. So we talked about grace and forgiveness and healing, and I prayed with her. You never know if you said the right things or not, and we never talked about it again. But over the next few months I saw a change in this woman when I would see her at church. She seemed less stressed, more at peace, happier than I had seen her before. I believe she had experienced a healing of her soul.

Healing starts with confession. So tell it to God. Take your dirty laundry to the wash. Take your garbage to the can and dump it. Confess your sin.

Then **RECEIVE THE FORGIVENESS OF GOD.** The Psalmist simply states one of the greatest truths of our faith: God will forgive our sin. *“So I admitted my sin to you; I didn’t conceal my guilt. ‘I’ll confess my sins to the Lord,’ is what I said. Then you removed the guilt of my sin.”*<sup>4</sup> So simple, so matter-of-fact, yet so life-changing and world-shattering in its implication. God forgives our sins!

This is a fundamental belief of our Christian faith. I John 1:9 says, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from everything we’ve done wrong.”* Through confession on our part and forgiveness on God’s part, our relationship with him, the relationship that was destroyed and is continually destroyed by sin, can be restored.

This phenomenal transaction is accomplished by Jesus Christ. He gave himself to death on the cross so that our sin could be forgiven, so that our relationship could be restored, so that we could be healed. As Paul wrote to the Romans: *“All have sinned and fall short of God’s glory, but all are treated as righteous freely by his grace because of a ransom that was paid by Christ Jesus. Through his faithfulness, God displayed Jesus as the place of sacrifice where mercy is found by means of his blood. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness in passing over sins that happened before... He also did this to demonstrate that he is righteous in the present time, and to treat the one who has faith in Jesus as righteous.”*<sup>5</sup>

This is not news to most of you, but it is Good News for all of us. I think sometimes we get so sophisticated and so comfortable in our religion that we forget the fundamental building blocks of our faith. We sin; we confess; God forgives us through the blood of Jesus. Even a child can understand that.

Lee Strobel is a pastor who got a phone call from a parishioner one day who had an embarrassing request. His little girl had been caught

shoplifting from the church bookstore, and he wanted to know if Lee would represent the church so she could come and apologize. The dad wanted to use this incident as a teaching moment, and Lee agreed. But Lee had a much bigger lesson in mind.

The next day, the parents brought their eight-year-old daughter into Lee's office and sat down. He asked her gently to explain what had happened.

The girl started to sniffle as she described a book she wanted, but didn't have any money. So she stuck it under her coat and took it. Tears came to her eyes as she said, "I knew it was wrong. I knew I shouldn't do it, but I did. And I'm sorry. I'll never do it again. Honest!"

Lee thanked her for her honesty, and then he asked her what she thought an appropriate punishment might be. She didn't know, so Lee thought for a moment and then suggested that the book cost five dollars, so she ought to pay that, plus three times that amount because she stole it. The little girl's eyes got kind of wide and fearful because twenty dollars is a lot of money for an eight-year-old to raise. Where would she come up with that kind of cash? Nevertheless, she nodded her agreement to Lee's terms.

At that point Lee taught that girl and her parents something about Jesus. He reached into his desk drawer, took out his personal checkbook, and wrote out a check for the full amount. He tore it out and handed it to the girl. As her mouth dropped open, he said, "I'm going to pay your penalty so you don't have to. Do you know why I'd do that? Because I love you. Because I care about you. Because you are valuable to me. And please remember this: That's how Jesus feels about you, too. Except even more."

The eight-year-old convicted sinner reached out and accepted the gift. Lee Strobel wrote, "I wish I could find the words to describe the look of absolute relief and joy and wonder that blossomed on her face. She was almost giddy with gratitude."<sup>6</sup>

What happens when we accept the gift of forgiveness? One, **WE EXPERIENCE PEACE**. The Psalmist witnesses, "*You are my secret*

*hideout! You protect me from trouble! You surround me with songs of rescue!”*<sup>7</sup> When we are surrounded by the forgiving grace of God, we are hidden in his love. We are protected from the storm. We are safe in his arms. We are not wasting away with our groaning any more. Our peace is restored. One of my favorite words of blessing comes from Philippians: “*the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.*”<sup>8</sup> Forgiven people experience the peace of God.

But more than that, when we receive forgiveness, **WE CAN EXPERIENCE DELIVERANCE FROM OUR SINS.** Forgiveness is more than a one-time experience. It restores a relationship with God that keeps on giving us peace, strength, and courage to fight the power of sin in our lives. Some sins don’t go away immediately. We struggle with habits, addictions, obsessions, dysfunctional relationships that didn’t develop overnight, and they won’t go away overnight either. Good news: God is with us for the long haul.

When I was a child, maybe 7 or 8 years old, we did a remodeling project on our house, and it changed the way things looked. One night I got up to go get a drink of water, and as I looked down the long, dark hallway toward the kitchen, everything looked different. In fact, I was sure that I saw some monsters lurking in the shadows that were suddenly unfamiliar to me.

So I went to my parents’ bedroom, and I woke up my dad. I told him I was thirsty. He suggested I go get a drink. I told him I was scared, and he told me not to be. I started down the hallway again, but those shadows still looked threatening, so I went back and asked my dad to go with me down the hall to get a drink of water. And you know what? He stumbled out of bed and took my hand and walked with me down the hall. And we didn’t see one monster! (The next day, however, a drinking cup appeared in the bathroom next to my bedroom.)

I don’t know what dark hallway you are walking down right now. It could be an addiction to alcohol, drugs, pornography—any number of things. It could be a marriage or a relationship that has developed

difficulties. It could be the threat of losing a job or reducing your income. Your dark hallway could be anything. But what we need to navigate the dark hallways of life is someone who will hold our hand and go with us.

That is what God does. That is what God longs to do, even more than my dad wanted to get out of bed and go with me. God not only wants to forgive our sin, but he wants to deliver us from the power that sin has on our lives. He wants to set us free, so that we can sing with the Psalmist, “*You surround me with songs of rescue!*”<sup>9</sup>

This is where we arrive if we confess our sins and receive the forgiveness of God. **WE EXPERIENCE JOY.** We find the happiness God intends for our lives. A new day dawns, and the sun shines; the storm is over, and we are saved. The Psalmist sings, “*You who are righteous, rejoice in the Lord and be glad! All you whose hearts are right, sing out in joy!*”<sup>10</sup> Nothing feels as good as knowing that your sin is forgiven, and you can start afresh with your life.

John Jefferson was a drug addict, a crackhead who robbed a Krispy Kreme doughnut store in Kingsport, Tennessee, in 1999. He got a whopping \$300 to support his drug habit. But the robbery somehow made John Jefferson feel so bad that he decided to turn his life around. Plagued with guilt, he turned himself in, pleaded guilty to the crime, and served six years in prison for armed robbery.

When he got out of prison, Jefferson wanted to make restitution to the Krispy Kreme store, so he called the detective who had arrested him and asked the detective to go with him and return not \$300 but \$400 to the store manager. The Krispy Kreme manager asked that Jefferson make his check out to St. Jude’s Children’s Research Hospital, which he did. Afterward, John Jefferson told a reporter, “I felt like a million bucks when I walked out of that place.”<sup>11</sup>

Do you want to feel like a million bucks today? Then follow these wise instructions from the Book of Psalms. Confess your sins to God. Receive his forgiveness. And you will find peace that passes

understanding, deliverance from the power of sin, and joy everlasting.  
Amen!

---

<sup>1</sup> "The Quickest Way to Gardyloo Gully," *news.telegraph.co.uk*, January 22, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Romans 3:23.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 32:3-4.

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 32:5.

<sup>5</sup> Romans 3:23-26.

<sup>6</sup> Lee Strobel and Gary Poole, *Experiencing the Passion of Jesus*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 32:7.

<sup>8</sup> Philippians 4:7.

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 32:7.

<sup>10</sup> Psalm 32:11.

<sup>11</sup> "What Goes Around, Comes Around," *FoxNews.com*, December 12, 2005.