

SESSION 3

THE SHELTER OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS

The Point

God's forgiveness repairs our hurt and brings us joy.

The Bible Meets Life

We carry a terrible weight when we've made a mistake or hurt another person. If they refuse to forgive us, it's like a power they have over us. Unforgiveness can be a weapon used against us; we never know when the person will fire one of our failures back at us. God never responds this way. Psalm 32 reveals just how forgiving God is and just how freeing it can be living under the shelter of His forgiveness.

The Passage

Psalm 32:1-7

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Psalm 32:1-7

¹How joyful is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!

²How joyful is the man the LORD does not charge with sin and in whose spirit is no deceit!

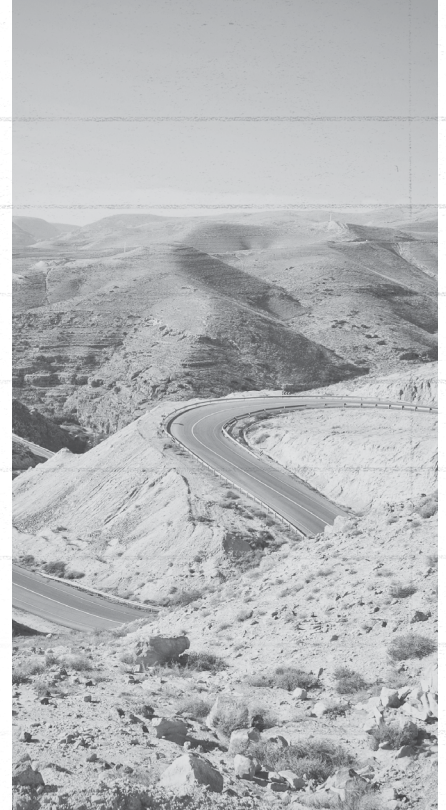
³When I kept silent, my bones became brittle from my groaning all day long.

⁴For day and night Your hand was heavy on me; my strength was drained as in the summer's heat. Selah

⁵Then I acknowledged my sin to You and did not conceal my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and You took away the guilt of my sin. Selah

⁶Therefore let everyone who is faithful pray to You at a time that You may be found. When great floodwaters come, they will not reach him.

⁷You are my hiding place; You protect me from trouble. You surround me with joyful shouts of deliverance. Selah



THE SETTING

Despite being identified by God as a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), David sinned in his affair with Bathsheba—and sinned again by attempting to cover up his adulterous activity. God saw through the cover up and sent Nathan to spotlight David's guilt. In Psalm 51, David poured out his heart in repentance over his sin and sought God's forgiveness. In Psalm 32, David rejoiced over the forgiveness he received.

ENGAGE

(15 MINUTES)



ITEM
4

Leader Pack: Direct students to the *Mended* poster as you discuss this session's point.

GET INTO THE STUDY

ENGAGE: Begin the session with one or more of the **Engage Options** on the next page. (This is optional. If you'd rather skip the **Engage Options**, just begin with the first discussion question.)

SAY: We carry a terrible weight when we've made a mistake or hurt another person. If they refuse to forgive us, it's like a power they have over us. Unforgiveness can be a weapon used against us; we never know when the person will fire one of our failures back at us, but God never responds this way.

DISCUSS: Have students discuss the question, "If you had to give up one thing forever, what would it be?"

GUIDE: Call attention to **The Point**. Explain that this is the key idea to keep in mind throughout the session.

THE POINT

God's forgiveness repairs our hurt and brings us joy.

READ: Read and summarize **The Bible Meets Life** for your group.

You would think the holidays would be an easy time to repair damaged relationships. After all, we're in a festive spirit, parties are going on, food is everywhere, and gifts are exchanged. But festive moods don't necessarily translate into mending relational fences. We have this lingering hope that someone will make the first move to ask for forgiveness, but it doesn't seem to happen very often.

Forgiveness is a gift that's often hard to give. Why? Because it costs so much. The person doing the forgiving essentially forks over the whole payment; the main cost is letting go of the hurt and giving up the offense that was committed. Forgiveness means you walk away from the judge's bench and stand united with the guilty party.

Forgiveness was costly for God, too. Jesus took our punishment, and through Him, God offers us forgiveness. No matter what we've done, God forgives. What a wonderful gift! This sense of being forgiven is not just an emotion. Psalm 32 shows us that God's forgiveness moves us to a place of restoration and joy.

PRAY: Transition into the session by praying that the Holy Spirit would restore our relationships.

Engage Options

► Lead with Action

When students arrive, ask them to anonymously write down something they did that week that they feel bad about doing. Direct them to place what they wrote in a box before the session begins. If appropriate, read some of the students' responses out loud. Say, **"We all do things we soon regret. We mess up and it quickly, or sometimes slowly, turns into guilt. It hurts every single time we think about it and hear about it. But there is One who removes the hurt and guilt when we ask for forgiveness for what we have done."**

OPTION: *This Action option might also be an interesting Media option. In the week(s) before the session, film your students "confessing" actions they regret. This could be serious or comical, but avoid minimizing sin.*

► Lead with Atmosphere

Enlist a student to stand on stage with you the entire session. Ask the student to wear a backpack. When you start the session, place a small weight in the backpack as you say, **"We all do things that require forgiveness, for instance you lie to your best friend."** Place weight in the student's backpack at this time. Throughout the session, randomly mention things that people do that need forgiveness and add weight to the backpack every time. At the end, ask the student with the backpack how he or she is feeling. Ask how heavy the weight felt over time, especially when weight was being added. Say, **"Unforgiveness is a burden that weighs heavy on us, yet God says that he will remove our sin as far as the east is from the west."**

OPTION: *Think about who you will choose to participate in this option with you. Avoid embarrassing a student or overloading a student with weight.*

► Lead with Media

Search the internet for the video "Break Every Chain (Lyric Video)" by The Digital Age. Say, **"Sin entangles us. There is true freedom in God's forgiveness as He breaks every chain."**

STUDY THE BIBLE

The Point: God's forgiveness repairs our hurt and brings us joy.

¹ How joyful is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! ² How joyful is the man the LORD does not charge with sin and in whose spirit is no deceit!

—PSALM 32:1-2

PSALM 32:1-2

READ: Ask a volunteer to read the following:

At the peak of David's reign as king over Israel, he blew it. He abused his power as king in order to sleep with a married woman named Bathsheba. Then, when she became pregnant, David arranged for her husband's death during a battle as a desperate attempt to cover over his sin (2 Sam. 11).

God sent the prophet Nathan to confront David about his actions, and the king repented. David confessed his wrongdoing and turned away from his sin (2 Sam. 12:1-14). Psalm 51 contains David's confession to God. And in Psalm 32—the psalm we will view in this study—we see David's response to the forgiveness of God: joy.

Joy can feel like a rare commodity in our lives. We are constantly looking for joy in the temporary things around us. Joy comes from something much more durable. Real joy arrives only in the form of Jesus.

GUIDE: Lead students to talk about the different ways we deceive ourselves.

David also found joy when he laid down his deception. We must do the same to experience the full joy of forgiveness from God. The deepest deception is the kind we often tell ourselves:

- ▶ **My sin wasn't *that* bad.**
- ▶ **I can stop whenever I want to.**
- ▶ **It's OK because no one really got hurt.**

SAY: When we decide to give up on the self-deception that comes with a rebellious life, then we can fully experience the joy that comes with God's forgiveness.

DISCUSS: Lead students to discuss the question, "What emotions do you experience when you receive forgiveness?"

Commentary

PSALM 32:1-2

Psalm 32 may be a follow-up to Psalm 51, David's confession of his sins related to adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah (2 Sam. 11–12). In Psalm 51, David poured out his heart in repentance over his sin and sought God's forgiveness. In Psalm 32 he rejoiced over the gracious forgiveness offered by God.

David began Psalm 32 with a proclamation of blessing containing two parts. Each part starts with a proclamation of joy and is then followed by two poetic lines. This phrase is actually one word in Hebrew and is used 26 times in the Psalter; it's traditionally translated "blessed" or "happy" (Ps. 1:1). The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5) uses the corresponding Greek word at the beginning of Jesus' statements we know as the Beatitudes.

In the lines of the blessing David used four different words to describe the full breadth of human sinfulness. Three of the four are paired with an appropriate image of divine deliverance and forgiveness. "Transgression" refers to acts of rebellion against God (v. 1). The Hebrew word for "forgiven" involves God lifting up, carrying, or taking away the burden of rebellion (Ps. 25:18). The word translated as "sin" in verse 1 identifies a breach of the law, usually by missing the mark or veering off the right path. God's response is to cover or conceal the sin (Ps. 85:2; Neh. 4:5). The word translated as "sin" or "iniquity" in verse 2 indicates perverted, criminal, or willful disobedience. In turn, God does not charge it to the sinner's account (2 Kings 12:15; 22:7). The manner of forgiveness in each line points to the completeness of divine deliverance, which in turn provides happiness, joy, and blessing.

The fourth word used by David to describe human evil is "deceit" or "guile." This word denotes fraud and deception, especially as carried out by a scheming, plotting person. While the other three words are commonly employed as synonyms for sin in the Old Testament (Gen. 50:17; Job 13:23; Mic. 6:7), deceit is rare and is found only 15 times, mostly in the Psalms, Job, and Proverbs. The rare occurrence of this word, and the way David used it, sets it apart from the other three. Because it refers to an individual without sin, the statement in whose spirit is no deceit does not require a divine response. David seemed to alter the poetic structure of the last line in order to lead the reader to the confession of sin in verse 5. The individual in whose spirit is no deceit is the one who is willing to confess sin to God.

TIP: *If you sense that the students would benefit from specific information in the commentary highlight those sections and come back to them during the session.*

STUDY THE BIBLE

The Point: God's forgiveness repairs our hurt and brings us joy.

³ When I kept silent, my bones became brittle from my groaning all day long.
⁴ For day and night Your hand was heavy on me; my strength was drained as in the summer's heat. *Selah*
⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to You and did not conceal my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and You took away the guilt of my sin. *Selah*
—PSALM 32:3-5

PSALM 32:3-5

SAY: During the time David refused to confess his sins, it sounds like he was dying on the inside. He had the sense that his bones were groaning and breaking—it was constant. The heavy sense of conviction David experienced was with him day and night. We come under God's conviction for the simple reason that He loves us. God wants us to confess our sin to Him. Our confession brings about two blessings from God: The sin itself is removed, and the weight of conviction is removed.

DO: Direct students to complete the **Action Point**, "Forgive and Forget?"

Forgive and Forget?

Find another student and discuss why asking for forgiveness can be so difficult. Talk through these reasons and then pray for each other.

DISCUSS: Lead students to discuss the question, "What are some practical ways you can pursue spiritual maturity?"

SUMMARIZE: Lead students through the following practical suggestions for getting better at confessing sin.

- ▶ **Review the day.** Set aside a time each day to allow God's Spirit to survey your heart and show you any sins you've committed.
- ▶ **Find the motive behind the sin.** Oftentimes, there are deep-seated issues that cause us to commit particular sins. Allow God to show you the motive behind the action.
- ▶ **Get God's view about the issue.** Ask, "What has God said about this in the Bible?" True confession is agreeing with God about our actions and attitudes.
- ▶ **Be specific.** Don't generalize. Instead, confess the individual and specific sins that the Spirit brings to mind.
- ▶ **Commit to repentance.** Completely turn from the sin with no desire to commit it again. Ask God for strength the next time you face temptation.

Commentary

PSALM 32:3-5

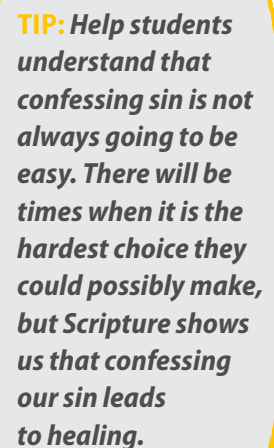
David realized God was pleased with a broken spirit and a broken and humble heart (Ps. 51:17). This is the kind of confession that brings deliverance and forgiveness. In these three verses of Psalm 32, David offered a personal example of moving from an experience of anguish over sin to the act of confession, and then to the gracious response of God's forgiveness. David attributed the cause of distress in verses 3-4 to keeping silent and refusing to confess his sin. He first admitted that when he kept silent his bones became brittle or wore out in groaning all day long.

The agony of unconfessed sin did not cease. Day and night David felt the hand of God was heavy on him. This pressure weighed on his conscience, and it signaled David's own recognition of the need for repentance. The turning point in David's distress comes in verse 5.

Without explaining or describing the events or circumstances that led to the point of breakthrough, David offered the solution to unconfessed sin. He opened up and acknowledged his hidden sin to God. Verse 5 contains the same three words found in the blessing from verses 1-2: sin (sin, v. 1), iniquity (sin, v. 2), and transgression. The order is different, but their use signals the thoroughness of the confession. In speaking to God, David declared in first person: I acknowledged my sin to You. The parallel line continues by noting that David did not conceal his iniquity. It is a blessing when God covers our sin from His sight. But in order to gain the victory over sin, we must uncover the sin, freely showing it to God.

"I will confess" indicates David's personal resolve to end the physical and emotional pain that came from harboring sin in the heart. David's confession in the first three lines of verse 5 is immediately met with God's forgiveness in the fourth line. There is no further punishment or penance required. David reported that God simply took away the guilt of his sin.

Two interesting points are found here in the fourth line. First, the verb translated "took away" is the same verb rendered "forgiven" in verse 1. God lifted or carried away David's sin. Second, the phrase the "guilt (or iniquity) of my sin" combines two of the words for sin in verses 1-2 (sin, v. 2; sin, v. 1). The doubling of the words emphasizes the completeness of God's forgiveness.



TIP: Help students understand that confessing sin is not always going to be easy. There will be times when it is the hardest choice they could possibly make, but Scripture shows us that confessing our sin leads to healing.

STUDY THE BIBLE

The Point: God's forgiveness repairs our hurt and brings us joy.

⁶ Therefore let everyone who is faithful pray to You at a time that You may be found. When great floodwaters come, they will not reach him.
⁷ You are my hiding place; You protect me from trouble. You surround me with joyful shouts of deliverance. Selah

—PSALM 32:6-7

PSALM 32:6-7

SAY: When we confess our sin to God, He removes it completely, and He fully restores our relationship. Once we have confessed and been forgiven, then we can live in the restored relationship offered to us by God. This happens as we recognize the nature of God and how He acts on our behalf

GUIDE: Lead students to identify three ways God cares for us.

1. God is our "hiding place." We need to find protection from the very judgment we deserve. God is fully justified to pronounce His judgment on us like an absolutely overwhelming flood. After our confession, however, God Himself steps in to be the place where we find shelter.

2. God is our protection. When we are living in a restored relationship with God, we do not have to fear any trouble. He removes fear and replaces it with His joy. We still face trouble, but we're never alone. God restores and protects.

3. God surrounds us with a celebration. When others ask for our forgiveness, we often respond by forgiving in a begrudging way. Thankfully, God doesn't respond like we do. He releases us from our guilt and begins celebrating.

DISCUSS: Ask students to answer the question, "How have you experienced God's forgiveness as protection or a hiding place?"

Commentary

PSALM 32:6-7

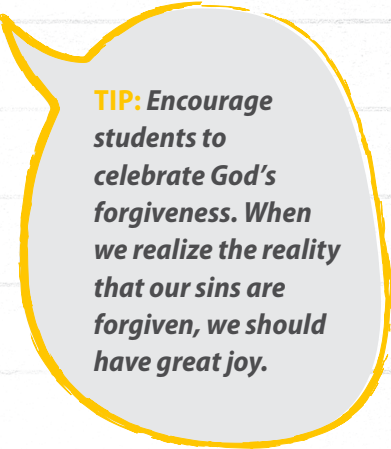
After sharing his personal testimony on the debilitating effects of unconfessed sin, David turned in verses 6-7 to speak about his restored relationship with God. He expressed this deeper connection through a prayer addressed to God. The beginning of verse 6 connects the prayer with the joyous affirmation that God had forgiven him at the end of verse 5. Because David understood the impact of this forgiveness, he first raised a request to God that others might not follow his example.

David didn't want others to experience the pain and suffering he went through, saying let the faithful pray. The faithful are the ones who practice covenant faithfulness with God. David prayed they would seek God at a time that He may be found. David recognized a sense of realistic urgency at this point, arguing for an established pattern of ongoing communication with the Lord (Isa. 55:6; Jas. 4:8). Such a relationship must be built over time.

David also recognized that trouble will inevitably come to the faithful. David used the imagery of the great floodwaters to represent the chaos that often confronts us in the problems and worries we face in life. The psalms point out that only God can rescue us from these chaotic forces (Pss. 18:16; 69:1-2, 14-15). The torrential floodwaters will not reach the one who has an ongoing relationship with the Lord (Ps. 124:4-5; Isa. 43:2).

David declared first that the Lord was his hiding place or shelter. David understood that God will hide the faithful in the protection of His presence. The Lord will conceal them from the schemes and plotting of others (Ps. 91:1). David then proclaimed that the Lord would protect him from trouble. The noun *trouble* can refer to the narrow or tight places we find ourselves in at times.

The prayer ends with a reference to songs of rescue. David was grateful that God surrounded him with joyful shouts of deliverance. The reason for the joyful shouts was that David had been delivered from the ravages of sin. The word translated "deliverance" here has the basic meaning of "escape." It was God who had brought him out, helped him to escape. Thus God had saved him (Pss. 37:40; 43:1; 71:4). But David was not only praising God for his own personal deliverance; he recognized at the end of his prayer that other worshipers singing songs of deliverance surrounded him. Others have also experienced forgiveness of sin; others have been restored to a right relationship with God; and others are rejoicing in the protective care of God. These are the confident songs of those who have placed their trust in the shelter of God's forgiveness.



TIP: Encourage students to celebrate God's forgiveness. When we realize the reality that our sins are forgiven, we should have great joy.

IMPACT

(10 MINUTES)

TIP: Consider sharing how God's forgiveness has manifested joy in your own life. Personal testimonies about God's work are powerful.

APPLY IT

SAY: We find healing and restoration in God's forgiveness, and in His forgiveness we find joy.

READ: Ask for a volunteer to read aloud a few ways students can take what they have learned and **Apply It**.

- ▶ **Confess.** Confess any sin that you are harboring or hiding. Turn from it, accept God's forgiveness, and make a plan with God about how to refuse its power in your life from this point forward.
- ▶ **Pray.** Pray for others who have not yet experienced the joy of God's forgiveness in salvation.
- ▶ **Offer forgiveness.** Offer forgiveness to someone who has wronged you.

GUIDE: Lead students to consider which of the three suggested responses to the Bible study most closely applies to them and their current circumstances.

ASK: Which of these responses do you personally need to focus on most as you live this session out? Allow time for responses.

WRAP UP

PRAY: Close in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to convict anyone in the group who may need to surrender their unconfessed sins to the Lord.

ASK: Ask students about last week's **Live It Out** options. Discuss any responses and encourage students as they choose to apply the Bible to their lives.

GUIDE: Encourage students to complete one or both of the **Live It Out** activities for the week. Let them know you will discuss them next time you meet.



For **free online training** on how to lead a group visit
MinistryGrid.com/web/BibleStudiesForLife

LEADER LIVE IT OUT

Before the session, challenge yourself to grow with your students through this Live It Out.

Operation: Forgiveness | Matthew 18:21-22

Are there people in your life that you need to offer forgiveness? In the space provided, write a letter to them. Tell them what you've learned about forgiveness. Offer them forgiveness and spend some time praying for them. If you continue to struggle with how they hurt you, come back to this letter and remind yourself about the overwhelming forgiveness you've received from God and the command from Jesus Christ to forgive others.

Notes:

ONE CONVERSATION™

Use these discussion starters to help foster a spiritual conversation with your family.

Scripture: Psalm 32:1-7

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE: We carry a terrible weight when we've made a mistake or hurt another person. If they refuse to forgive us, it's like a power they have over us. Unforgiveness can be a weapon used against us; we never know when the person will fire one of our failures back at us. God never responds this way. Psalm 32 reveals just how forgiving God is and just how freeing it can be living under the shelter of His forgiveness.

STUDENTS

THE POINT: God's forgiveness repairs our hurt and brings us joy.

- How has God used forgiveness for healing in your life?

Discuss the following quote: "Once you realize all that it cost God to forgive you, you will be held as in a vise, constrained by the love of God."¹ —Oswald Chambers

1. Oswald Chambers and James Reimann, *My Utmost For His Highest* – Updated (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 2006), 20.

LIVE IT OUT: Your student has been encouraged to do one or both Live It Out activities in the Personal Study Guide. Here are some suggested ways to help your student:

*If your student chooses to do **Operation: Forgiveness**:*

- Encourage your student to offer forgiveness to those who have wronged him/her.
- Talk to your student about the importance of forgiving others in light of the forgiveness we receive in Christ.

*If your student chooses to do **Reconciliation Ambassador**:*

- Commit to pray with your student for the people that need Christ's reconciliation.
- Pray that your student will be burdened for his/her friends who don't know Christ.