

The Joy of Repentance

May 17, 2026

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Psalm 32; 51

Session Outline

1. The Joy of Forgiveness (Psalm 32:1-11)
2. A Guilty Plea (Psalm 51:1-5)
3. A Prayer for Restoration (Psalm 51:6-19)

Theological Theme

God's good character and powerful work in our lives deserves authentic worship.

Call to Action

Set aside time dedicated to the worship of God this week.

The Joy of Repentance

Introduction

Maybe there is a particularly moving moment you remember when the words of a praise song hit you and spoke into your life during a specific season. Maybe there's a particular song that always seems to bring you straight to the throne of Jesus.

Worship like this is powerful and important, but it doesn't fully represent what "worship" is. We worship when we respond to God's goodness in our lives. God is always good, and He deserves to be worshiped not only for sending His son to die on the cross for our sin (there is no greater "saving act"!), but also for the ways He shows up in the everyday lives of His children. God steps in and works miracles. He shows up when we are at our lowest. He provides peace and calm when it makes absolutely no sense for us to feel that way. He opens doors we don't expect and aligns meetings and conversations in a meaningful way.

Since worship is our response to God's character and work, worship can take many forms. Meaningful worship happens in song at church on Sunday mornings, but it is not confined to this holy space.

Today, we're exploring two psalms of David. David responded to God's saving acts in his life in many ways including poetry, song, dancing, and an unflinching trust that God would take care of him. Worship is a lifestyle.

- ❓ What comes to mind when you think about worship?
- ❓ What examples of worship do we see in the pages of Scripture?

Session Summary

We are lucky to have vast scriptural record of David's life, and in it, we see so many causes to worship (and know there must be many more causes to worship that were never written down!). Today, we're going to explore two psalms that David wrote as worship in response to great acts of mercy and love that God did in David's life.

1. The Joy of Forgiveness (Psalm 32:1-11)

- ❓ What themes stand out to you in this Psalm?
- ❓ What of God was David responding to in this passage?

This Psalm is attributed to David, the famous king of Israel. Scripture describes David as a man after God’s own heart, and he penned many psalms in worship to the Lord.

The category of “maskil” is assigned to 13 psalms in the Psalter and this is one of them. Scholars aren’t entirely sure what a “maskil” was, but think it may be a memory passage, that may contain wisdom and instruction of some kind. In this psalm, we read about the joy that can be found in forgiveness.

Think about a time when you failed and it ate you alive. Maybe you had trouble sleeping. Maybe you wept. Maybe you withdrew and felt panic and anxiety over the uncertainty of what to do. How did you feel when you brought it to God and He took the burden away from you?

The Hebrew word David used here that is translated “forgiven” (v. 1) paints a picture of the burden of sin being lifted off a person. Have you experienced that feeling? “Joyful” and “blessed” seem like insufficient words to describe the experience of relief and peace when we turn things over to God. Jesus’s redeeming work on the cross means that our sins (past, present, and future) are forgiven, but when we sin, it separates us from God and plants a burden on our shoulders. We experience this feeling of a lifted burden when we surrender our sin before God.

If God were truly to take us to court, He would have a very long list of sins we could be charged with. But He doesn’t do that. Instead, He offers us forgiveness. God offered David forgiveness many times in His life, and we are offered a different kind of forgiveness in Christ.

The silence David had in mind in verse 3 referred to when we do not acknowledge our sin before the Lord. We know we have sinned, and yet, we make no move to confess it or seek forgiveness. What misery David described here! He used images of brittle bones, non-stop groaning, and strength drained like you have been out on the hottest Tennessee summer day (v. 4). The role of God’s hand in this instance is to convict.

Joyful

The Hebrew word for “joyful” here is ‘ashrey, which some translations translate as blessed. Both translations paint a beautiful picture of this interaction between David and the Lord (the specific relationship in which David described being forgiven).

Perhaps you can relate? Have you ever sat on your sin and suffered? Felt God convicting you, but weren't ready to take a step yet? It feels heavy, hard, and miserable.

This must be how David felt in 2 Samuel 11 and 12, after he had sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah. He didn't confess his sin until the prophet Nathan confronted him.

This misery is always of our own making, but God offers peace, joy, and blessing on the other side, when we follow the actions David wrote about in verse 5. When we uncover our sins, and bring it before God in humble apology, He forgives us even though we don't deserve it (v. 5).

Repentance

When we sin, the best path forward is to bring it to God immediately (v. 6).

When we sin, the best path forward is to bring it to God immediately (v. 6). God is the safe space for us in the turmoil and aftermath of our sin. We shouldn't read these verses as meaning God always removes any fallout. We are delivered from our guilt, but not the consequences our sin has sown (and sin always has consequences). In fact, David's sin with Bathsheba had disastrous consequences, and God didn't shield David from them. Still, God offers His peace, relief in knowing we are forgiven, and guidance on what next steps to take.

- ❓ How have you experienced the relief of receiving God's forgiveness in your life?

In verse 8, God takes over as the speaker and offers wise counsel. All true wisdom comes from Him (Proverbs 2:6). While "many pains come to the wicked" (v. 10), those who trust in the Lord enjoy God's faithful love surrounding them. This is worth being glad, rejoicing, and shouting for joy (v. 11)!

2. A Guilty Plea (Psalm 51:1-5)

- ❓ This psalm was written after David with confronted by Nathan for his sin with Bathsheba. What indicates David's repentance in these verses?
- ❓ How did David respond to God in worship in the midst of his own conviction?

This psalm is directly attributed to the time in David's life when he sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah. Nathan's confrontation of David happened in 2 Samuel 12. This psalm is one of the ways David responded (David often turned to the written word in his worship).

This psalm offers a prayer of restoration. David was brought low by his sin, and we are reminded of Psalm 32:3-4. In this psalm, David cried out to the Lord from the darkness of the valley (maybe the darkest valley of David's life).

Don't miss David's heart posture. He knew he had sinned, and he did not make excuses for it. He admitted that God was right to pass judgment (v. 4). David owned up to his mistakes and cried out to God for forgiveness knowing he didn't deserve it but God is gracious, faithful, and abundant with His compassion (v. 1).

This is the first step in handing the burden of our sin over to God. We must first acknowledge our sin in order to authentically take it to God and ask for His forgiveness.

 What might be surprising about David's confession in verse 4? What does this indicate about all of our sin?


Note who David said he sinned against here. He sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah (and many other humans through his actions), but by choosing to sin in this situation, he also sinned against God (v. 4). When we sin against each other, we first sin against God, who calls us to love one another the way Jesus loved us (John 13:34-35).


Verse 5 has historically been interpreted in many ways by Bible scholars. One of the most common interpretations is that this points to the doctrine of original sin. We are born sinners and are sinners for our entire existence. In this verse, David emphasized the extent of his guilt. He didn't just sin in this one act, he had always been sinful.

3. A Prayer for Restoration (Psalm 51:6-19)

God desires a better life for us. A life of integrity. A life of faithfulness. God teaches us true wisdom.

Hyssop was a plant meant to be employed by humans in cleansing rituals (see Num. 19:18), and here David asked God Himself to purify him with hyssop. When David receives this cleansing from the Lord, David wrote expectantly of "joy and gladness" (v. 8), rejoicing where there had once been a crushed spirit.


 Why do all people need to be washed clean of our sin?

 How has God provided the ultimate answer to this need?

Here, David penned one of the most well-known verses in Scripture:

God, create a clean heart for me
and renew a steadfast spirit within me. —Psalm 51:10

David asked for a transformation of heart and spirit. This type of work only happens with the Lord. We can't do it alone, and in this psalm, David pled that God would stay with him. Not take the Holy Spirit away. Not banish him. He knew how necessary it was to walk through life with the Lord.

 Why should God's forgiveness made available through Jesus lead us to continual worship of Him?

This passage is one of the many places that the Old Testament emphasizes God's heart for relationship (vv. 16-17). Our acceptance was never about our ability to execute a checklist of good things. God has always desired relationship with His people. Old Testament law made a way for sinful humans to have a relationship with a holy God, but the sacrifices were never the point. Relationship was. God has opened the door to a reconciled relationship with Him through the finished work of Jesus. Because of this reality, we have continual reason to worship.

Conclusion

In Psalm 32, David, fully aware of the weight and severity of his sin, worshiped in response to being forgiven by God. The limbo between sinning and surrendering that sin over to the Lord is turmoil. We feel heavy, drained, and weighed down. But, when we confess our sin to God (David recommended to do so immediately in v. 6), we enjoy the incredible relief of that burden being lifted. This forgiveness (when we absolutely don't deserve it), is worth worshipping over, and one of the ways David worshiped was to write this psalm.

In Psalm 51, we get further insight into the turmoil that comes because of sin. In this psalm, David openly acknowledged his guilt against God, and asked God to wash away his guilt and cleanse his sin (v. 2). He knew he couldn't achieve this alone. He required God's help. David could hope for forgiveness because he knew firsthand the goodness and fairness of God's character. God extends grace, is faithful to love His people, and faithful to extend compassion (even when we don't deserve it). Ultimately, David's hope was in the work of Christ, even before he knew it. The same is true for us.

Importantly, David reiterated the importance of relationship. Even when the sacrificial system was active and needed, the heart of the law was always about relationship. God desires a relationship with us, and when we sin, it separates us from God. We do well to remember David's words, adopt a humble, contrite heart posture, and confess our sin before God.

David worshiped in the midst of his own failure. God is always worth our worship as we see Him rightly and respond in reverence.

- ❓ How can we worship in every season and moment of life?
- ❓ Think about a time that God forgave you of a transgression. How did you respond? How would you like to respond in the future in worship?
- ❓ What do these psalms teach us about God's character? How can we share this truth with others?

Prayer of Response

Thank God for His abundant compassion and willingness to forgive us time and time again. Ask Him to cultivate a humble heart in us that brings our sin to Him seeking forgiveness. Ask Him to lead you to worship as a part of everyday life, and not just on Sunday mornings.

Memory Verse

God, create a clean heart for me and renew a steadfast spirit within me. —Psalm 51:10

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Psalms 1–50* by J. Josh Smith and Daniel Akin
- *Exalting Jesus in Psalms 51–100* by David Platt, Jim Shaddix, Matt Mason
- *The Treasury of David* by Charles Spurgeon



Historical Context of the Psalms

Purpose

There are myriad messages scattered through the 150 psalms, but overall, this record of the responses of God's people in worship and prayer serves the purpose of teaching us how to relate to God in various circumstances of life. The psalms also demonstrate God's sovereignty and goodness for his people in order to instill confidence in those who trust in him.

Author

Since the book is a collection of many different psalms written over a long time, there is not just one author for this collection. By far the most common designation in the titles is "Of David," which may refer to David as the author of those psalms. David's role as a musician in Saul's court (1Sm 16:14–23) as well as his many experiences as a shepherd, a soldier, and a king make him a likely candidate for writing many of these psalms.

Setting

The book of Psalms consists of many different hymns and prayers composed by individuals but used by the community. If one were to take the names in the titles as authors, the date of composition ranges from the time of Moses (fifteenth century BC) to a time following the exile (sixth century BC or later). Some of the titles do contain historical information that might indicate the setting of the composition, although even this (like the authorship) is ambiguous. They might not refer to the date of composition but to the setting of its contents, being composed some time after the events had taken place. This is a more likely scenario since some of these psalms describe life-threatening situations, where composing a psalm in the heat of the moment would not have been a top priority. In many cases, these psalms include thanksgiving sections as well, showing that they were written after God had answered the prayers.

Special Features

The word for psalms in Hebrew is *Tehilim*, which means "praise." The English title is derived from the Greek translation (LXX) *Psalmoi*, which means "Songs of Praise." Praise directed to the Lord, the God of Israel, is certainly the primary emphasis in the Psalms. Some have referred to the Psalms as Israel's hymnbook, which is partially true but overall is insufficient to account for all that is in the Psalms. More than one-third of the collection is made up of prayers to God. Therefore, it contains both hymns and prayers that were used in the context of Israel's worship.

Extended Commentary

Psalm 32

Bible interpreters classify the psalms in different categories according to their subject matter and focus. Psalm 32 is a penitential psalm. In penitential psalms, the writer often cries out to God because of his sin and asks the Lord's forgiveness, or the writer experiences and describes the joy of God's forgiveness after confessing his sin to Him. Psalm 32 is the latter type of penitential psalm.

Some Bible interpreters consider Psalm 32 the follow-up psalm to Psalm 51. They believe David wrote Psalm 32 after he experienced the joy of God's forgiveness. The Hebrew word "maskil" in the psalm heading probably denotes some kind of contemplative or reflective psalm.

King David began his psalm with a beatitude expressing the joy of God's forgiveness. The expression how happy is also could be translated "o, the happiness of" and further stresses David's joy. David used several words to describe his failure to meet God's holy standard. These words also may describe our own sinful situations. Transgression denotes a defiant rebellion against God's standard—one in which sinners deliberately cross the line God has established. Sin denotes falling short, missing the target, missing God's righteous standard. David used the word covered to mean "covered once and for all," that is, God would never uncover David's sin again.

Believers today need to understand this important truth. Once God forgives our sin, He forgives our sin—period. God's Word assures us we are forgiven when we confess our sin (1 John 1:9).

The Hebrew word translated "sin" in verse 2 is a different Hebrew word that has as its basic meaning "crookedness." David described the joy of the one who no longer had sin charged to his account. God had straightened out his life. once he had experienced God's forgiveness, no deceit could be found in his spirit. The joy of God's forgiveness also had brought to David an inner change of attitude.

Joy is a natural by-product of God's forgiveness. Forgiveness should also help us grow in our desire to serve Him. our human nature encourages us to pursue that which will make us happy, but happiness can be elusive and temporary. Real happiness does not come from fleeting circumstances, but from knowing God and the joy of His forgiveness.

David described the terrible battle that occurred within his soul as he kept silent about his sin. He felt as if his bones became brittle and ready to snap due to the internal anguish of his groaning all day long. Outwardly, David tried to act as if nothing was wrong, but inwardly he knew his guilt. He also probably sensed that others around him knew of his sin. Almost certainly those within David's "inner circle" of leaders had figured it out. David's inward groaning of spirit finally became too much for him to bear, and he experienced God's forgiveness when he confessed his sin. David described how day and night he struggled inwardly. He testified how God's hand was heavy on him, eventually bringing David to a point where he knew he could not go on without confessing his sin.

Believers often experience such inner pangs of conscience when their sin separates them from God. We feel like the weight of the world is on our shoulders, but that weight may well be the loving hand of a patient God gently nudging us to confession and repentance.

The Hebrew word translated "drained" also can mean "overturned" and aptly describes the churning of David's soul within him. The summer's heat could be quite oppressive; temperatures might well reach 100 degrees or more in the

wilderness of Judah and the Jordan Valley. Typically, no rain falls between May and September in Israel, so no relief is readily available from the heat. David's sin sapped his spirit as the summer sun sapped his strength.

Adults may experience times when they have asked for God's forgiveness, yet still feel guilty. God is eager to forgive, yet we may sometimes have difficulty forgiving ourselves, which leads to a false sense of guilt. God does not want us to live in this state, but to recognize that He has extended to us His forgiveness in Jesus Christ when we ask Him to forgive us. Romans 6 assures us that Jesus died to break sin's power in our lives, and Romans 8 reminds us we have no condemnation if we stand in Christ by faith (6:1-4, 12-14; 8:1-4).

The turning point came in David's life when he acknowledged his sin against the Lord. He literally made known to God a sin God already knew, but David needed to confess it to experience the true joy of God's forgiveness.

The Hebrew word translated "conceal" also means "covered" and is the same Hebrew word used in verse 1. David might try to cover his sin, but only God could permanently cover it and deal with it. The words "I said" reflect the decision David made. He would confess his transgressions to the Lord. For David and for us, confession is more than admitting our sin. It involves seeing sin as God sees it and turning from it in repentance.

The Bible asserts that all of us fall short of God's holy standard (Rom. 3:23). Agreeing with God about our sin problem is the first step to cleansing. Even Christians sin and need God's forgiveness on a daily basis to restore them to fellowship with Him. The Bible also affirms the certainty of God's forgiveness if we confess our sins (1 John 1:9).

In light of the great truth of God's forgiveness for all who repent and confess their sin, David called on people everywhere to pray and seek God's face. The words at a time that you may be found remind us of Isaiah 55:6, where Isaiah encouraged the people to seek God's face right then, while a relationship with Him was present in their minds. In the New Testament, Paul encouraged people to call on God now, for now is the acceptable time of salvation (2 Cor. 6:1-2). We should not put off establishing a relationship with Jesus Christ by faith, and we should not put off experiencing the joy of God's forgiveness through confession.

The mention of great floodwaters is interesting and somewhat unexpected since Jerusalem, located on high ground, would not likely experience such a catastrophe. However, floods are sometimes known in the wilderness and desert canyons of Judah, when the hard rocky ground cannot quickly absorb hard rains and gently flowing channels quickly become rushing tides. David probably intended this expression in a figurative sense to describe challenging adversities, as did the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 43:2). The prophet Nahum used similar imagery to describe God's sweeping judgment (Nah. 1:8), but judgment is not intended in our focal passage.

God was David's hiding place, his place of refuge. David knew the peace and joy of God's forgiveness as he experienced quiet solitude with his Lord. The Hebrew words translated protect and trouble sound very much alike and would have provided.

Thus far in the psalm, David had described his own experience of confession and forgiveness. The Lord God now responded to David in verses 8-9 with the promise of His instruction and guidance. He would help David grow through the experience. The Hebrew word translated "instruct" carries the sense of imparting wisdom and insight.

It is related to the word *maskil* in the psalm's heading. The word "show" also could be translated "teach" or "instruct" and is related to the Hebrew word *torah*, which is usually translated "instruction," "teaching," or sometimes "law." God's eye watched over David for good; the imagery suggests God's personal, intimate involvement in the relationship. The words "give counsel" describe the Lord's role as David's trusted counselor and advisor. The Lord had a perspective on David's life that David could never have, just as the Lord sees our lives from a perspective we cannot have. Faithful obedience and trust should mark our lives when we follow Christ, even when we do not fully understand what He is doing.

David began speaking again in verse 10. He acknowledged that many pains come to the wicked. Evildoers do not have the benefits of a relationship with the Lord, so they go through life totally without Him. Many struggle to make sense of life, while others have no time for the things of God. They have no foundation for life, and they have no guide for life. In contrast, David acknowledged that God's faithful love surrounds those who trust Him. God's love provides His children a foundation on which they can build their lives. In fact, God Himself builds on His foundation as He guides them.

David closed his psalm by encouraging all righteous ones and upright in heart everywhere to rejoice and shout for joy. God not only cleanses them of their sin, but He also empowers them to become better people. He sets them free to embrace life in all its fullness as they experience the joy of His forgiveness.⁵

Psalm 51

51:1-6. After realizing the error of his sin, David appealed first to the mercy of God, even before he mentions his sin. No matter the monstrosity of sin, God has infinite amounts of mercy to lavish upon those with repentant hearts. He asks God to blot out his transgressions - this word in the original language is a judicial word. David realizes that he is guilty. He asks that his sin be wiped away and no record would appear against him, which is only possible through the mercy and grace of God. David was deeply sorrowful for his sin and committed to turn from it.

51:7-15. David asked God to clean him with hyssop, which was traditionally sprinkled into the water of purification and directly relates to the sprinkling of blood of Jesus in Hebrews 12:24. David asks God to not look upon his sin and to not remove the Holy Spirit from him. David knew that he had grieved the Holy Spirit by his sin, which had caused him to withdraw.

51:16-19. David recognizes that he cannot make satisfaction for sin, but that men despise what is broken but God does not. David knows that God alone can renew his spirit and redeem him through the forgiveness of his sin.⁶

References

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