

Psalm 32

“People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess them and turn from them they will find mercy.” Proverbs 28:13 NLB

Introduction

This Psalm has been linked to the call for revival! There cannot be any true revival without the conviction of sin in our lives. The paradox is that sin seems to offer life, but at some time creates death. “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” Proverbs 14:12 – NAS Sin creates a debt before God and a debt in our relationships with others and even ourselves. That debt has to be paid off. Sin steals life rather than gives us life and that is why we need revival. Sin opens the door for the devil to steal the blessings that God intends us to have. It invites us to feel that we deserve to be punished and put under a curse rather than be blessed by a gracious and loving God. We in the faith community often think of revival as the call to salvation, where sinners come to see the error of their ways and find forgiveness in the works of Christ our savior, a one- time event. However revival is not just understanding that we are justified through faith in the completed works of Christ but also it is the continual call to new life, His life as we are convicted of sin which “so easily entangles us,” and distracts us from following Jesus. Salvation in our faith walk is the continual process of being saved. This psalm is a call from God to confess our sins. In this Psalm the sin maybe sexual, or the injustice of using power to exploit others or both. The confession brings revival as is stated in the sister Psalm 51, “Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation, and sustain me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners will be converted to Thee.” Vs 12-13 NAS Some of the strongest testimonies are personal testimonies of brokenness, how sin entangles and destroys lives, until grace and redemption bring deliverance and freedom.

In our culture we think of salvation as a one- time event when a non-believer prays the sinner’s prayer and accepts Christ into their life and then goes to heaven. In the context of this psalm salvation is a correction that puts us back on track as a believer has strayed from a right walk with God and His Kingdom. When Jesus goes to the house of Zacchaeus and demonstrates his grace and inclusion to this chief tax gatherer “a notorious sinner,” Zacchaeus confesses and repents. Jesus does not lecture him about salvation by grace alone, but says, “Salvation has come today...” God’s grace had brought revival to Zacchaeus so he faced his own sin and was willing to confess, repent and make amends, the restorative process which will end this commentary. In this psalm, the person of faith has over looked their own sin and is heading towards judgment because they have not faced their sin and confessed it, so there is a call by God for a confession of sin. In the New Testament the call of God is not a demand or a burden, because Jesus makes provision for His will. “My burden is light and my yoke is easy” comes with this relationship of grace with Jesus. He has already paid the price for our debt of sin, and forgiven us and if we can trust Him for that then we can obey Him by confessing our sins. In a nation that is called Christian maybe what we need is revival where we face our sin and confess it so we can truly “teach transgressors God’s ways, and sinners will be converted to Him.”

Plantinga, who wrote, "Not the Way It's Supposed to be: A Breviary of Sin," says that we have abandoned the doctrine of sin in our culture. "To put it mildly, modern consciousness does not encourage moral reproach; in particular, it does not encourage self-reproach. Preachers mumble about sin." (pg X) Karl Menninger wrote a book years ago called "whatever Became of Sin," which he was bemoaning the fact that as a culture when the concept of sin left so did personal responsibility for our short comings. Alan Bloom wrote a book called, "The Closing of the American Mind," which he basically says that where the goal of education through the centuries was to create virtue and character, American education gave that up for the accumulation of information and competency in a field of study. He also was suggesting that as post modernity took root there was a loss of a Biblical perspective which has hurt us as a culture. This psalm is a psalm emphasizing personal responsibility for sin and that God will hold us accountable. We are to grow in character as Christ is formed in us. This is not even the only Biblical perspective for dealing with sin in scripture, but a call by God to pay attention to the work of His word in convicting us of sin, and that without applying this Biblical teaching we, our churches, culture and nation will ultimately suffer.

Salvation comes from God and sin is what is often revealed to us when we look to God and see what is blocking our way. Sin is about personal responsibility in the context of a relationship with a God who saves from our sin. Even though there is a lot about our part in this psalm never forget that the central theme of the gospel is God's grace, His work and not ultimately our responsibility. However we do have a part to play, an important part. Confession of sin is our responsibility but still a work of God in our sanctification. I hope this psalm and my commentary brings light on this process to those reading it.

DAVID'S SIN HIDDEN

Psalm 32 is probably one of the psalms David wrote after his attempted cover up of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah the Hittite. Most people look at these psalms and think they are about the need to find forgiveness from sexual sin, but perhaps the greater theme is freedom; freedom from deception and pretense that God grants through His grace. David was the most godly king in the history of Israel, "a man after God's own heart" and yet we have a story of rape, adultery and murder that stain this image of a godly man. Today even in an age where the concept of sin is minimized or even negated people are afraid to be honest about their short comings. Why? Over the years I have heard hundreds of stories of why people have hidden their sins from others. The faith community often comes to Christian counselors to confess their sins, if they know they are safe and can find grace. There are many reasons that people do not face their own downsides and the God who already knows all of our sins. Years ago a friend of mine told me a story of how his wife kept telling him what a wonderful husband he was. The problem was he knew a side of himself that she was ignorant of, and the knowledge of that side could change her image of him as a wonderful husband. There was an incongruence between his inner life and his wife's image of him. Most of us would rather have people, especially our family members think well of us rather than poorly. Like many he was afraid to self disclose because of negative consequences. He was a godly man who had practiced being "rigorously honest" with himself by going through recovery and continuing to do moral inventories, face resentments and fears in order to stay sober. In this case his sin was not his addiction it was a sin of omission, he had failed to file his taxes for the last several years and no one knew except God, himself

and the IRS. So he sat the family down and told them he was not who they thought he was. He was willing to suffer the natural consequences of being one who falls short, even the guilt and shame of his sin. The interesting unintended consequence was that his honesty instead of bringing shame and rejection brought **freedom** to others in the family so they could confess their short comings. God's grace came through his trust of God and willingness to confess to his family. The paradox being, sometimes we have to admit we are wrong before we can get right! Maybe that is the divine purpose of this psalm! David's confession, an act of obedience, allows us to be able to be "completely honest" with ourselves, God and others about our sins. Knowing and accepting our sinfulness at times may be as important as knowing that we are "new creatures in Christ," it is also a part of the sanctification process in the New Covenant as we die to the old we are alive to the new. Sometimes we can only see our new identity in Christ by facing and shedding our old through obedient confession of our sins. Religious people deny their own depravity and therefore cannot be honest about their own short comings, because their esteem and security lies in their own religious performance and identity, so the old religious nature pushes out the new life nature that is there in our relationship with Christ. Jesus hated religious pretense and used the word hypocrite seventeen times when confronting the false religious faith of the religious leaders of His day. Hiding our sins only alienates us from God and makes us fools in the faith community, and laughed at by those in the world. What a wonderful freedom from pretense and the rigidity of punitive social systems when we can see and accept our own sinfulness. Grace creates freedom, the ability to be honest even about the bad things in our lives. "There is no condemnation in Christ" for He has done a work for us and in us, so we are not defined by our mistakes but by His work that he has done to save us from sin and death. Behavior may define our activity, but not our true identities in Christ as children of a loving God.

DEFINED BY GRACE RATHER THAN RELIGIOUS PERFORMANCE

Years ago I had a client who had very high moral standards. As I heard his story and the standards he aspired to I was amazed at his integrity. However, his faith was more about rules, standards and character perhaps Law, than about a relationship with a God of grace. In his life he had fallen from grace. For several years he had violated his own moral codes and also his families. He was so ashamed he was depressed and suicidal. He took a pistol put it in his mouth and said "God if you are there you will have to stop me because I can't live with myself anymore." Right then the woman he had been having an affair with, a woman from another race, who his father would not approve of knocked on the door. Shortly after that incident he came to see me to get help. His dilemma was he did not want to be a sinner saved by grace. He wanted the sinful side of himself not to exist! He wanted to be a good man a righteous man and what is wrong with that? His image of himself was not something he could live up to! He would have been a person, who would struggle with the little saying, "there but by the grace of God go I." Before this time in his life he could not have imagined falling short the way he had. After months of counseling he said to me "it is only the grace of God that will allow me to live with myself. Jesus has paid the price for my sin and I have found the ability to forgive and accept myself in Him." He also went to his family and was honest with them and they embraced him rather than rejected him.

After doing years of counseling and working with many pastors and church leaders I am convinced that everyone sins, "No one is good not even one." Romans 3:10 The best, most godly people in our

community fall and being able to admit their sins to God, themselves and others is essential to their faith. This is true of the most godly as well as the most ungodly members of our community. Knowing our own depravity is not a curse but part of God's redemptive plan. We cannot really appreciate our redeemer if we do not understand our need to be redeemed. In one story a prostitute and a Pharisee respond completely differently to Jesus. The Pharisee is cold and distant to Jesus and the "immoral woman" pours out a humble and amazing love to Jesus. Jesus then said to a Pharisee, those who love much are those who are forgiven much by telling a story about debt and redemption or forgiveness of debt. The problem in the religious community is that we often think that faith is about being good and then miss our need for a savior, we miss our level of debt before God, we think we owe God a debt of \$50 when it is more like \$500 or really 50 million. We like the Pharisee in this story who did not show love or respect to Jesus, think faith is about "our righteousness or goodness" and miss our depravity unlike the woman who knows her sinfulness. Faith is not primarily about us and our godliness or goodness (self centered religion), but about God and our **relationship** with a holy and yet gracious God.

The value of knowing our brokenness. "We value blessing over brokenness." John O'Hair We value godliness more than brokenness and so stories of recovery are not as valuable as stories of success or conformity to Truth in the religious community. With a culture of success it is hard to communicate our failures and often shame stops us from sharing our stories. However the Bible is not shy about sharing about sin and failure, and how God works redemption into a broken, fallen and failing world. This story and this psalm is about David's failure as a great king: Self-sufficiency over neediness, success over failure, tend to be the predominant values of our culture, but Paul says, "I will boast only about my weaknesses." (2 Corinthians 12:5) To be truly Biblical all of our stories hold value and are a part of God's redemptive plan. That is why we see so much paradox in the Kingdom of God. "The first-most successful will be last and the last the most broken will be first." The harlots and tax gatherers enter the Kingdom of God before the Pharisees and other religious experts. When we value our brokenness we are **free** to be **completely honest** which I believe this psalm is all about.

PSALM 32

Oh, what joy for those whose rebellion is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight! Yes what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of sin, whose lives are lived in complete **honesty!**

When I refused to confess my sin, I was weak and miserable, and I groaned all day long. Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat.

Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to **hide** them. I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the Lord." And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.

Therefore, let all the godly confess their rebellion to you while there is time, that they may not drown in the floodwaters of judgment. For you are my hiding place; you protect me from trouble. You surround me with songs of victory.

The Lord says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you. Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control." Many sorrows come to the wicked, but unfailing love surrounds those who trust the Lord.

So rejoice in the Lord and be glad, all you who obey him! Shout for joy, all you whose hearts are pure!

DAVID'S SIN OF OMISSION LEADS TO SINS OF COMMISSION? MAYBE?

The context of this psalm maybe David's sin with Bathsheba as some Biblical scholars link psalm 51 and psalm 32 together as a part of his confession. The context of the situation is David side steps his normal mission. "The following spring, the time of year when kings go to war.....David stayed behind in Jerusalem." (2 Samuel 11:1) What happens to men when they do not do what God has called them to do? When they are not in line with God's call and purposes for their lives? Not doing right is often a more grievous sin than doing what is wrong. "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin." (James 5:17) This text says that David did not go to war, but does not comment and say David sinned before God, but we know that sins of omission call down God's judgment and have consequences the same as sins of commission! (Mathew 25:31-46) Maybe David was not told by God to go to war or maybe he was, the text does not say so it is hard to know if he was already being rebellious or negligent towards God. Was it his task? His responsibility? His call as King? Call has an element of relativism in it; it does not have so much to do with truth as it has to do with relationship, with a personal context, the Caller and the called. Truth requires a response when God's voice speaks to us in that truth, that is one of the ways that the Holy Spirit works in our relationship. God's word becomes meaningful and alive as we hear His voice and is activated by the Holy Spirit. Each believer has a context in which their own relationship with God exists and sin is where we fall short of doing what God's will is in that context, but maybe only God truly knows the intimacies of that relationship and context. Would David have committed adultery if he had been out "fighting the Lord's battles?" Did boredom, a lack of challenge or purpose, and adventure lead him to look for life in the wrong places? Was David too worldly? Was God allowing this sin for some divine purposes?

Kings of Israel were not to collect women, horses and silver and gold. (Deuteronomy 17:16-17) Kings were to be reminded of this daily and it was to keep them from becoming proud and thinking of themselves as better than the citizens that they served. (Deuteronomy 17:20) They were to be humble servants rather than be proud arrogant leaders! They were to read God's Word daily and meditate on its meaning for their life, to apply his Word and truth. This was where their blessing would come from when they were in alignment with God's will and His covenant with them. It was a covenant of blessings and curses that required obedience to stay out of trouble and in God's favor; where God's favor or grace is based on the completed works of Christ in the New Covenant. The Kings of that era had many wives and this was the reward and status symbol of a man in power. Not collecting wives, horses and silver and gold would be like a man of power today staying in a marriage for life, driving an old pickup truck and giving away most of his millions as a CEO. What reward is there under the sun for all my toil and hardship, is the worldly question asked by King Solomon? It is hard not to normalize our life by the

world's rewards and standards; we are all human and enjoy similar things. It is so easy to direct our eyes to the world and lose sight of God. Is God a good God who does reward His children? What do we deserve? Should we have all the rewards of this world, especially when we are called to lay up treasures in heaven? Are we embittered when we do not get what we think we deserve and then act out of entitlement with anger, demanding we are justly rewarded for our contributions rather than being thankful for the fact we do not get what we deserve from the wages of our sin? Henry Ward Beecher says, "Pride slays thanksgiving... A proud man is seldom a grateful man, for he never thinks he gets as much as he deserves." (Life Thoughts, Gathered from the Extemporaneous Discourses of Henry Ward Beecher pg 115) Are we to suffer less than our savior? Are we to be rewarded differently than our suffering servant Lord for our sacrifice? Knowing our own depravity and the consequences humbles us and helps us to not be arrogant and angry at our lives. Understanding that we will receive our rewards from Christ as we focus on Him and seek our lives from Him helps us accept our lowly position when we struggle with ingratitude and wanting to be independent from our Lord. God does grant many blessings in our lives and wealth, a good spouse and honor can all be a part of the blessings of God in a person's life. When we lose sight of God's grace in the midst of our depravity we lose perspective. So maybe David was already losing focus, it is hard to interpret narratives, but something was wrong. David was already violating this Biblical imperative and collecting wives, now he was collecting other men's wives and violating the Ten Commandments as well as this specific Biblical imperative.

SINS OF IGNORANCE

In the book of Leviticus which gives a lot of information about sin and the offerings for sin there is the concept of sins of ignorance that believers sin out of ignorance of the commands of God. God is patient and slow to anger and understands our fallenness, so He graciously provides an offering for our short comings. One of my friends says, "I'm not defiant towards God I just don't ask what his will is because I like to do what I want to do." His sins are not intentionally rebellious, but sins of ignorance because he is not asking about what God wants in his life. Jesus probably references this when he is praying for forgiveness for those who crucified Him. "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Wow what grace Jesus expresses towards those who murder him. He recognizes their ignorance in their actions towards Him. Sometimes we just have no idea of the significance of our actions and how they are sinful. How sin can create a huge consequence that has eternal significance! In the Old Testament Israel was being judged because they lacked knowledge of God and with that, knowledge of their own sin. "My people are being destroyed because they don't know me." (Hosea 4:6) Was that what happened when David saw a naked Bathsheba on the roof? If we do not do God's will God's way in every area of our lives there are consequences! We are sinners by nature, as one commentator says when talking about the sins of ignorance, we just sin without even trying to sin. So we need to seek God and listen to the Holy Spirit in order to keep us sowing seeds that produce life rather than seeds that produce death and corruption. It allows us to exchange the old nature for the new divine nature which is our true nature and who we are in Christ. Yes God is also at work in us to transform us to the image of Christ and so must we be. In the Old Testament when a believer individually or corporately became aware that they had indeed violated the commands of God they were instructed on how to make their offering, Leviticus chapters 4-5. Sin has consequences whether we are aware of them or not. We are

directly responsible to God for our sin and He does facilitate accountability. Nations, communities, churches and individuals are all judged by God even when they sin “unintentionally.” Often our intentions are even good intentions but we are still sinning. Good intentions can pave the way to hell. Judgment is a natural consequence like accidents when driving drunk or getting into debt from over spending. Judgment comes from a life lived apart from God, His ways and divine nature. Jesus said He did not come into the world to condemn it, that is already condemned, we often just don’t know it. Often we learn from our lives and the consequences of our choices, like a teenager who wants to do things on their own, but soon learns some truth about life the hard way. True spirituality requires reflection on the consequences of our thoughts, feelings, desires, words, and actions and calls us to line up with the will of our God who desires to bless us and not judge us. The offerings were a type that represented the divine offering of Jesus sacrificing himself to cover our sin and demonstrate His love for us. In the New Covenant he is also the author and finisher of our faith and is committed to his work in us, forming Christ in us the hope of glory.

INJUSTICE THE ABUSE OF POWER

In this story as David sins with Bathsheba and murders Uriah, Nathan the prophet shows up to correct this wrong and call for confession and repentance. (2 Samuel 12) Interestingly enough, he does not approach King David from a one up religious moral superiority position, but appeals to him as his King. He also does not make this sin about adultery or sexuality, but about injustice and exploitation. Nathan requests that David make a judgment, David’s role as king, in regards to this rich man who is abusing his position of power and has taken a poor man’s only lamb. David is angry and doles out a judgment regarding the injustice of this case and then Nathan tells him he is this abusive man of power. David is broken over his sin and the consequences of his sin. He writes about this incident; “The sacrifice you want is a broken spirit. A broken and repentant heart, O God, you will not despise.” (Psalm 51:17) David is learning to line up with God’s will in this area of his life through owning his sin and understanding his independent soul that is out of sync with God’s life and will the hard way.

COMPLETE HONESTY – VS 1-2 “OH WHAT JOY FOR THOSE WHOSE REBELLION IS FORGIVEN, WHOSE SIN IS PUT OUT OF SIGHT. YES WHAT JOY FOR THOSE WHOSE RECORD IS CLEARED OF SIN, WHOSE LIVES ARE LIVED IN COMPLETE HONESTY.”

In the New Covenant Christ’s blood has cleared us of all our sin, because he paid the price. He was and is the offering for sin! “.....having forgiven us **ALL** our transgressions, having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” (Colossians 2:13-14 NAS) The certificate of debt was like the paper nailed to the jail cell when you were put in prison with your crimes against Rome. When we understand the weight of our own sin forgiveness brings tremendous joy! It brings a burden lifting relief and a perspective that helps us change from one of gloom and doom to hope and a future.

One of the basic beliefs of our faith is that we will be held accountable for the way we live our lives. Every choice will one day be judged by God and all sin and transgression will be exposed. Also every act of faith, godly motive and act of righteousness will also be revealed and rewarded. This is a very difficult

concept today in a culture that embraces cheap grace and views intolerance and judgment as the number one sin. Cheap grace meaning that sin is really not that bad, don't make a big deal out of the things that the Bible describes as sinful, God is loving and forgiving. We all sin, everyone is human it is "normal." I have worked with many people over the years that have gone to jail or prison for their sin-crimes and they have a deep appreciation for the cost and consequence of their sin-crime. The severity of God in His judgment is a hard concept. To understand the gravity of sin is difficult. In a culture that often has a difficult time respecting authority even correction may seem like harassment. Nathan's pronouncement of God's judgment on David's sin may seem extremely harass to us today and might make us very uncomfortable with a God who has authority to judge.

"From this time on, the sword will be a constant threat to your family, because you have despised me by taking Uriah's wife to be your own. Because of what you have done, I, the Lord, will cause your own household to rebel against you. I will give your wives to another man, and he will go to bed with them in public view. You did it secretly, but I will do this to you openly in the sight of all Israel." (2 Samuel 12:10-12) These are the consequences for David's sins even though he found grace and forgiveness through confession. Forgiveness and God's grace did not eliminate consequences!

These consequences do not seem to fit a God of grace who is willing to send His son to die for us. That may be because it is so hard for us to understand the eternal perspective on sin, and its consequences. God is intolerant of sin and evil and has paid the price for us all to line up with His will and restore all of creation to its original order and purposes. Minimizing the weight of sin and its consequences has been normal behavior for believers for thousands of years, but has kept us ignorant to who God is and how He works in our lives. When Israel was facing God's judgment for their accumulative sins of breaking their covenant with God they consistently minimized the possibility of being defeated and taken into captivity, the consequences for rejecting God. The Major Prophets kept warning them that judgment was coming if they did not confess and repent, but they lived in denial!

"I, the Sovereign Lord, am watching this sinful nation of Israel, and I will uproot it and scatter its people across the earth....But all the sinners will die by the sword- all those who say, 'Nothing bad will happen to us.'" (Amos 9:8-10) The denial that God is a just and holy God, who has to judge evil because He is righteous.

They believed that they were special and that God had chosen them and that their religious rituals made them right with God and immune to judgment, yet the prophets had another perspective that Israel was trying to ignore. There were three main sins that brought judgment on Israel. The first was idolatry. Today idolatry is not the worship of craven images but putting second things first. One theologian says, "The idols of America are surely materialism and sex, but the greatest idol of all is the worship of self in America." Are we making ourselves more important than God, putting second things first? Are you? Putting man's interests above God's authority is the sin of self worship or idolatry.

It is easy to see sin when a person is more interested in going to the bar than going to church, their idol is alcohol and the self that is enmeshed is the alcoholic self. However it is much more difficult to see the idolatry of a mother who goes to church so her kids will be good and be safe and loses her faith when

God allows one of them to be bad or injured. Her children are gifts from God and being a mother is a call, but it also can become very self-centered rather than God centered.

Satan in the garden minimized the choice of rebelling or transgressing against God's authority. He also over emphasized the severity of God's restrictions while minimizing the consequences of rebelling. "You won't die!" the serpent hissed. God knows that your eyes will be opened when you eat it. You will be just like God, knowing everything, both good and evil." (Genesis 3:4-5) The result being that Eve was convinced, deceived, and then disobedience and the fall, which brought about the introduction of evil into the world and the loss of innocence. We have been following this pattern for thousands of years, transgressing God's will and authority and bringing evil into our lives with many unforeseen and unintended consequences. The elevation of self is the most seductive sin. I like the recovery quote that says, "I may not be much but I'm all I think about." Self is our most common reference point. It maybe entangled in drugs, religion or video games but when it is not putting God first it is often on a road to destruction. Idolatry is much harder to see than behavior and much more pervasive as sin.

To face the consequences of our sin and truly **understand** what we deserve may be too overwhelming for us as people, without a great understanding of His love, grace and redemption. To find ourselves in the hands of an angry, holy God who destroys sin and evil through His judgment can be terrifying. Jonathon Edwards the great American theologian described this in his sermon, "Sinners in the hands of an Angry God." The scripture Edwards uses is, "Their foot shall slide in due time." Deuteronomy 32:35 Sin accumulates and without confession and repentance we will slide into judgment. This call to confession is recognizing a straying from God to other idolatries and sins that captivate a heart that is to be set on God. His point is that God has the power to bring judgment and will, nothing can stop Him.

"Look now; I myself am he! There is no other god but me! I am the one who kills and gives **life**; I am the one who wounds and heals; no one can be rescued from my powerful hand!" (Deuteronomy 32:39)

To be able to face this threat we may also need to grasp the gravity of His grace and be able to embrace receiving that which we do not deserve, the insurmountable grace given by Jesus Christ in paying the price Himself for our sins. What that means in terms of a relationship with a redemptive God and what that means in terms of the consequences of our own sin is what we have to come to terms with in this life! That is the context of this Psalm a sinner knowing the gravity of his own sin and the consequences of that sin and then understanding the eternal weight of glory in Christ's death on the cross granting forgiveness and joy. We all have a context, a life in which we live and need to find how to trust and obey Jesus in that context. Lord show us your will and your way and how to turn to you when we are off course; when our heart is full of affection for things that push you out. Grant us light that we might come out of our darkness, be forgiven and receive the joy of our salvation; so we will be able to be completely honest first with you and then ourselves and others.

CONFESSION – VS 3 "When I refused to confess my sin, I was weak and miserable, and I groaned all day long."

Why would we refuse to confess our sin? Part of the work of the Holy Spirit is to convict us of our sin. To show us how we are connected to life that is apart from God and His nature. Psychologists say we

have many selves. We may have an athletic self, a work self, a parental self, a religious self all of which have some sense of significance and power. Power and significance give us a sense of well being, where in contrast powerlessness and worthlessness often undermine that sense of well being. When facing and owning our own sin we emotionally may feel vulnerable and want to be defensive and self protective, tenaciously holding on to positions of significance or power that may be apart from God. Like a snake sheds its skin, putting off the old may make you feel tender and naked. Several times in my life I have transitioned from a place of position and power to one of insignificance and weakness. With those transitions usually I felt broken and conscious of sin in my life. I could clearly see my pride and sinfulness in this broken state. During those times, I usually say, "I used to be somebody now I'm in a place of feeling like a nobody." We are all humbled by facing our own sin and its consequences; seeing idolatries in our lives that we have attached ourselves too. God is doing a work in all of our lives and He is faithful to finish what He is loving enough to begin. Intimacy is being known and God completely knows us, the good and the bad and loves us and helps us face our own depravity through his grace. Three times in my life I have experienced an ending to an identity that I believe was replaced with a more Christ centered identity. When I was a young man I went to the top as an athlete, becoming a college scholarship athlete. I believe I came to an ending of having this athletic identity as a primary identity in college. When you work hard and find a lot of significance and security in an identity it is hard to divest from something you have been so invested in. I had the opportunity to take my college experience into a career, but knew God was calling me on. It was difficult to pry my clinging hands off that identity where I had been highly rewarded and validated as a person. How do I let go of something I'm good at and that God has blessed me with? My next identity was more of a religious identity as a local pastor and I ended up feeling validated in this role and position as well. I have collected in my mind many compliments that were rewarding for the work and sacrifice I put into what I have done. In this area the head of the Presbyterian Church nationally had courted me and was asking my little Jesus movement church to become Presbyterian. He offered me property, status and position. He said, "Your church is the best I have ever seen in the country." He was courting me and enticing me with praise, it almost worked. When I stepped down as a pastor a few years later, I felt a huge loss and again a challenge to my identity. I believe God is responsible for doing the work of sanctification and draws us into His Kingdom for His purposes. However we can hang on to old identities with a very tight grip rather than let go and move on. All of us are faced with this in roles like being a mother, a husband, child, business man or whatever maybe given us for a time. As a counselor I have seen many people hang on to identities too long and ruin what was at one time good. When the children are grown many parents who are empty nested feel lost and without purpose, but going back to parent grown children is often destructive. Moving on can be anxiety provoking and without faith, cause us to be lost. It is scary to not have reference points for our significance and security outside of the spiritual realm. To be loved, valued and secure are a part of our most basic needs and are surely not bad things, but to find those in our Lord first is sometimes a challenging adventure. Our true worth and security as believers is really tied more to our being and our relationship with God than our performance, position, power or the roles that we fulfill, but it may not feel that way.

Many years ago during the Jesus movement, I was discipling a young man who had a strong identity as a drummer in a rock n roll band. He was learning about "putting off the old and putting on the new." His

bonding with his non-believing band members blinded him at times to the issues of worldliness that entangled him. On Halloween day we were doing a Bible study about being a “new Creature” in Christ. He was living at one of our Christian half-way houses when one of his band members showed up and told him he was going to dress as Jesus Christ for their gig that night and was going to do something completely sacrilegious on stage. My young friend said, “I felt like I was between God and the devil with a choice of who I was going to associate with.” Often our choices are not that pronounced, but we do have choices to shed old skins-identities that are in opposition to our true natures as children of God. In times like these we are called to question issues of our heart. What do I want in life? What am I pursuing in life and why? Who am I? These questions are transformational because they move us out of the old life into the new. There are many metaphors for this process given in scripture repent and believe, put off the old man and put on the new man, dying to self that the life of Christ maybe manifest, etc.

In Ephesians 4:22 Paul says...“throw off your old evil nature and your former way of life.... Then follows with....Instead, there must be a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes. You must display a new nature because you are a new person, created in God’s likeness-righteous, holy and true.” (Vs 23-24) Throwing off is a strong description of what to do with sin and old identities apart from your identity in Christ. Part of that process is confession. When we hide a sin it grows in power and keeps a hold on us, but when we confess it, it loses its power over us. Sometimes we need to confess it to not only God, but other people as well. Confession breaks the hold that pride has on us and brings humility to our lives. This is what David is teaching and knew from personal experience. To confess that something is wrong aligns us with God and changes our loyalty from the old self and other things that would compromise our relationship with Christ. The writer of Hebrews says, “...let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress. (Hebrews 12:1) Again strong language about getting rid of the sin in our life that the Holy Spirit shows us on our journey as He corrects and convicts us to bring us more in line with the life of Christ being formed in us.

RESISTING GOD

In David’s confession he admits that he resisted confessing his sin. He was fighting God and resistant to His correction, but all that did was make him weak and miserable. Some people do not recognize when they are fighting God. David did not and therefore had the first step of church discipline administered by Nathan. When we cannot see the spiritual, even though we may experience some sense of being powerless confrontation may come. My favorite story of not seeing the spiritual is the story of Balaam and his donkey found in the book of Numbers. Balaam is a spiritual man and has a relationship with God. He takes off on his donkey to speak to some Moabite leaders and God is angry with him and yet he is completely unaware. He sees his problems as circumstantial and related to a stubborn donkey, when in reality they were based on a conflict with God, he could not see. He is fighting God not a donkey or circumstances. Balaam experiences frustration as he cannot get the donkey to go where he wants it to go. Balaam’s donkey can see the angel of the Lord, but Balaam cannot. Sometimes we think we are so spiritual and we do not have the eyes to see. The Lord uses the ass to confront Balaam, and then the Lord opens Balaam’s eyes so he can also see the angel of the Lord and soon discovers that his anger at what appears to be a stubborn donkey is really a wrong judgment about a faithful animal, who is saving

his life. With this realization Balaam confesses to the angel of the Lord, "I have sinned...Numbers 22:34 and repents and yields to God's will for his life. Sometimes we over spiritualize but most of the time we are probably like Balaam, unaware of what is going on spiritually in our lives and how we are resisting God. We need to ask God, what are you doing please open my eyes to see you. Please Lord don't allow me to fixate on people, places or things when you want me to see the spiritual, to see you and your work in my life. Am I blind to a sin that is causing me to not trust you and obey you or yield to your Spirit?

What allows us to see our sin and confess it so we will be right with God? So we may become who He has called us to become? We may know more of His power to fulfill our call in our lives? John wrote that Jesus had no sin in Him and that if we sin and go on sinning we will walk in sin-darkness and break our fellowship with God. It is not that we are not forgiven but that we can and do sin and need to confess it as God reveals it to us through the power of His Spirit. David said, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts." In other words show me where I don't trust you and walk independent of you. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life." (Psalm 139:23-24) David knew that to be right with God he needed to **know** his sin and confess it and repent of it. The person who refuses to confess their sin breaks fellowship with God and will eventually also alienates others. We can't always see where we are independent from the ways of God, like Balaam. I have always been appreciative of the fact that God does not show us all our sin at once because that could be devastating. He does expose it as we draw near to Him, because light exposes darkness or sin. John says, "But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his son, cleanses us from all sin. If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts." (1 John 1:7-9) John's book was written to expose a faulty doctrine called Gnosticism which denied sin in a person's life. Being a Christian counselor I have seen and experienced many believers that are practical Gnostics. They deny the sin in their lives rather than confess it and repent of it and so walk in darkness. This was what David was doing for a year after his sin with Bathsheba until Nathan confronted him; he was being a practical Gnostic rather than a true believer. He was refusing to confess his sin! So God brought about discipline in the form of Nathan. Lord, help me to be a true believer who responds to your Word and bring light into my life!

DISCIPLINED – vs 4 "Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat."

Years ago a fellow Christian counselor had a client that was anxious and suicidal. For months he did everything he knew to do to help her with her anxiety and depression, but with no success. She was headed for an institution when she came to him and said, "I've been having an affair and have been trying to hide it and it is causing me tremendous guilt." That guilt was also causing her depression and anxiety. My friend was surprised by her confession, but soon all the pieces came together that made her misery make sense. Was that the hand of God's discipline upon her? Was it her own guilty conscience?

God disciplines us because He loves us! Discipline is harder work than love and support. When a parent is nurturing, a child usually appreciates the care and both parent and child are happy. However when a child is disciplined they can have a variety of responses. They can resist and fight their discipline believing they do not deserve it, which really makes everyone miserable. They can resign themselves to the discipline and pout and be depressed over the consequences, which is not that much fun either. If a child knows they are loved the discipline is still unpleasant but they know it is for their benefit and they accept it. However we as parents rarely get a, “thanks I needed that” response, so discipline is a difficult task that many parents neglect. It takes hard work to love and discipline a child. The parent who neglects this task in scripture is viewed by God as unloving and in the case of Eli the priest was judged by God severely for his sin of omission in not disciplining his sons. I think we are all guilty of neglecting this task at times, or at least I know I am. God however does discipline his children.

“My Child, don’t make light of the Lord’s **discipline**, and don’t give up when he corrects you. For the Lord **disciplines** those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child.” Hebrews 12:5-6

The question becomes do we recognize God’s hand of discipline in our lives and submit to it?

“Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn’t we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits and live forever?” Hebrews 12:9

It is often difficult to spiritualize difficult circumstances and understand how God is at work in our lives to bring holiness and righteousness in through his discipline of his children.

“No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening –it’s painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those trained in this way.” Hebrews 12:11

David was always looking for God and how He was at work and personalized or at least questioned his circumstances wondering what God was doing. His view of how intimately involved God was in his life is recorded in psalm 139. David did not believe in an impersonal God, but one who knows every event, thought and cell in our lives.

“You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed. How precious are your thoughts about me, O God? They cannot be numbered.” Psalm 139:16-17

In this part of David’s life God’s personal touch was discipline, which was painful but meant he was guiding David into holiness and right living. However David needed to see God’s divine purposes and love in order to submit and confess his sins.

Accepting discipline is often experienced as a loss. It is discouraging to be disciplined and to be able to submit to discipline is also very difficult. David was an athlete-warrior and so discipline was a part of his life and that may have made accepting God’s discipline a little easier. David does not want to lose his child with Bathsheba and humbles himself before God. Often we as people become very sober minded as we face negative consequences. We are willing to confess and bargain to eliminate consequences that are hard. Sometimes all the confessing and repenting cannot bring the blessings back and true

repentance is accepting the consequences because we know we deserve them and have owned that fact. When Esau sells his birthright for his hunger pains he has given up something of great value just for immediate gratification and then realizes what a mistake he made, but cannot undo it.

Hebrews 12:15-17 says, "Make sure that no one immoral or godless like Esau, who traded his birthright as the firstborn son for a single meal. You know that afterward, when he wanted his father's blessing, he was rejected. It was too late for repentance, even though he begged with bitter tears." When David's child with Bathsheba gets sick David fasts and lies on the ground for seven days begging God to relent, but the child dies. Everyone is worried that David will not come out of his depression, but after the child dies he goes back to business and accepts this as from the hand of the Lord. David has lots of emotion, probably depression and shame and God uses that to help David know his sin. However his first response is to go worship God at the tabernacle. He does not quit being faithful to God, loving God or living according to His purposes. So negative emotions, that are normal in a difficult situation, did not define his choices. However his life is harder, he has lost a child because of his sin, a fact he will never forget. He is a broken man. Sometimes to continue to do what is right, what is good, what is loving really challenges our faith.

It has been nine months since my wife died of lung cancer. The intensity of that experience has colored my world and the colors are not bright. For me faith has always been difficult. I have a science background and the seen is easier than the unseen to grab a hold of in my life. My wife's grandmother died of lung cancer, her mother died of lung cancer the year before she died and her father died of cancer; so genetics would be an easy answer to my life circumstances, the why questions. However I know God was at work even in this difficult loss. I still do not claim to understand it and may never. Not all suffering is from sin and is not about God's discipline, but sometimes it is. In this life we will have tribulation that is also a promise. I have been taking care of family members who are sick or dying for fourteen years first my dad, then my mother and wife. I've been the main caregiver. It is a great call to love our family members, but also causes suffering as we suffer with them. Sometimes we just share in the suffering of Christ as we love others and that suffering has nothing to do with the consequences of sin. Paul says, "I am glad when I suffer for you in my body, for I am participating in the sufferings of Christ that continue for his body, the church." (Colossians 1:24) Jesus suffered and it was not because of sin. We can often be too judgmental of others when we observe suffering assuming it is because of them being sinful (bad), but in Hebrews 5:8 it says, "Even though Jesus was God's son, he learned obedience through the things he suffered." Even Jesus in his humanity was broken though He was sinless. Brokenness brings out sin in most of us, but much of the time is not because of sin, brokenness teaches us to trust and obey God. See my commentary on Psalm 91 for more on brokenness and sin.

I get perspective through reading and studying God's word. It is a lens that I get to look through that allows me to peer into the spiritual realm. It opens my eyes to things I cannot see otherwise. However in this area of sin or correction it can be painful to look and see ourselves in our sinfulness. I had a supervisor as a counselor who said to me, "I quit going to church because it made me feel bad about myself." One of my mentors as a young pastor was, Dr. Ray Stedman who said, "Most believers quit confessing their sins by the second or third year after conversion because it is painful." However transformation comes from taking off our masks as Dr. Stedman would teach in his book, "Authentic

Christianity.” David took off his mask and even though facing his sin was very painful he wrote about it so we all could benefit. David became one of our first wounded healers. He also did not give up or give in to the discouragement of facing sin and the consequences, but stepped up and continued to be faithful to God and serve as King. He shared his weakness so we could be strengthened!

Galatians 6:9 Says, “So let’s not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don’t give up.” Doing something bad does not eliminate all the good you have done, but it may feel that way in moments of time. God promises that He is a God of blessing, but we need to focus on Him and His promises to hold on to our call and responsibilities. David was amazing in that way. He seems to be able to trust God in his most vulnerable times. Maybe this psalm is written to encourage us in our brokenness.

Grace Through Confession – vs 5 “Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, “I will confess my rebellion to the Lord.” You forgave me! All my guilt is gone.

Here is the breakthrough! Finally David says I confessed all his sins to God. He is known completely for all that he is before God. David was guilty and was hiding his guilt, but who knew? Was the whole kingdom a buzz with the gossip about David and Bathsheba and David was busy covering up? It is God’s job to uncover that which is covered up by our deceitfulness. When Adam and Eve sinned they covered their nakedness and hid from God, so God asked them, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?”(Genesis 3:11) Then Adam replied, “It was the woman and you gave her to me.” What if Adam had been a godly honorable spiritual leader and said, “Satan be gone, I will serve my God and obey his commands only,” how different things would be. The temptation was to ally with Eve who had already eaten the fruit and changed her loyalty to the devil. If Adam had been strong spiritually and stayed allied with God rather than switching his primary loyalty to his wife and the devil he would have been resistant to temptation and redemptive rather than a blamer. This is the issue of where our deepest loyalties lie. To be loyal to God and obey Him above all others is our calling. We are to give ourselves to God with all of our being. When Jesus confronts Peter about being more loyal to himself and viewing Jesus’ crucifixion from a human point of view he says, you have set your interests on man’s interests and not God’s. Then he is told to be truly a disciple Peter is called to take up his cross and be loyal to God’s will above his own will.(Mathew 16:23-24) However this is also a work of God as Peter tries to do this in his own strength and then fails. In the story of the fall the first spiritual gift is born, the gift of rationalization and justification. Of course it is a gift from the devil the father of deceit and lies. Adam was to be the spiritual leader not the passive, dependent, compliant husband blaming his wife and God! I used to have a cartoon with the hand of God pointing at Adam and Adam’s hand pointing at Eve. What we are dependent on we blame! They say that addicts blame people, places and things for their addiction. David may have been a sex addict and ownership is difficult, but essential for recovery. Ownership facilitates maturity and healthy independence and also true spirituality. David has owned his sin and confesses without blaming Bathsheba coming clean with God. Did she have a part, bathing naked on the roof where David could see her? The issue was not whether or not she had a part but whether David owned his rebellion towards God’s authority and commands. “I will confess my rebellion to the Lord.” The Bible was not written in a time where the

concepts of complexity (everyone in a system contributes to the problem) but in a time that was focused on linear thinking (cause and effect) who caused the problem.

When David confesses his sin the slate is wiped clean, he is forgiven! His guilt is gone! He has found favor with God through confessing his sin. He is not trying to appear good, but is honest about his depravity, which then allows him to be made right with God. He is in agreement that he sinned and rebelled against God. However that allows God's grace to bring forgiveness, not that God is dependent on our confession for demonstrating His grace, He is not. Often it is His kindness, grace and goodness that brings us to a safe place where we can confess and repent of our sin.

OUR CALL TO CONFESS VS 6 Therefore, let all the godly confess their rebellion to you while there is time, that they may not drown in the flood waters of judgment.

This is our call to confession. David's calling us to revival so God's judgment will not fall on us. Paul who taught us the New Covenant, believed in confession and the judgment of God. In 1 Corinthians 11:28-31 Paul calls New Testament believers to "evaluate themselves" so that God's judgment would not fall on them.

"That is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking the cup. For if you eat the bread or drink the cup without honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself. So that many of you are weak and sick and some have even died. But if we examine ourselves, we would not be judged by God in this way. Yet when we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned along with the world."

This was a corporate as well as an individual call to make sure that sin was not dwelling in the body of Christ in Corinth. This theme in scripture runs from the very beginnings to the end of our Bible. Sin enters the world in Genesis and the churches are corporately confronted on their sins and called to confess and repent in the book of Revelations to avoid God's judgment. The Greek word for sin – hamartia- means to "miss the mark" or to fall short. It is the word used in archery when aiming at a target and falling short of the bull's eye. In the New Testament the issues of sin focus a lot on love and how well we love and if we love. They are not first moral or ethical standards but relational. Are we loving in a way that invests in the well being of others? Do we love our enemies? Do we love those who hurt us or betray us? Are we committed to loving the way that God would have us love others? Are we just reciprocating in relationships rather than trusting and obeying God? Are we vulnerable in relationships because of the risks we take by walking in faith?

We often define sin as the worldly sins such as adultery or homosexuality, drug addiction or stealing, but there are so many ways that we sin that the Bible does not purposely give us extensive lists, but does give us categories, like worldly sins, religious sins and sins of omission. This is a devotional so it is meant to cause us to be reflective rather than give us all the answers. I think one of the greatest causes of sin in America is that we want to be safe, comfortable and hassle free. So we may not get involved with things that are difficult and uncomfortable and feel entitled to have personal peace. The consequence of this may be that we neglect our families, our churches, our communities, even our world. When we get to heaven and stand before God our judge we may see all the opportunities we were given to serve

Him and the consequences to others when we were too self absorbed or too busy to attend. I first was involved with my present agency doing cuddling with detoxing babies at a local hospital. One of the babies was born addicted to methadone, but was getting some drugs from his mother by nursing. This baby was taken away by CPS- child protective services a standard practice, and given to a foster mom to care for him. However she was not told he was addicted to methadone and when he began to detox he was in severe pain. The foster mom brought him back to the hospital so he could be diagnosed. He needed to be helped along in his detox and cuddled to ease his pain through the loving arms of a mom. What if there were no hospitals or no moms to cuddle hurting drug addicted babies? There maybe foster children that you are supposed to minister to but because of buying into the cultural norms more than the Kingdom imperatives you and I miss things and fall short of what God calls us to. We as Americans may have bought into affluence as our right and neglected the poor. Therefore saying to Jesus, "when did we see you hungry," and He says you didn't because you were not looking for me in the poor and hungry of the world. We have to seek him and desire to do his will in order to not sin, that is our part. Jesus says, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to accomplish His work." (John 4:34) We may say, "but we were not sent or we did not know God's will," to which he might reply??? Back to our story about David.

TRADING EVIL FOR EVIL SYSTEMIC EVIL

One of the main reasons I believe that David was viewed as such a godly man is that he did not trade evil for evil in relationships. Sin is relational; it has to do first with our relationship with God, but also ourselves and others. Most of my clients over the years, trade evil for evil in their families and do not even know they are sinning. Sin has a lot to do with relational dynamics. For example a wife may be hurt that her husband neglects her in some way. She becomes hurt, anxious and then angry, she lashes out verbally and emotionally (sinning with her tongue) and feels justified because of what he did or did not do and how she feels. He then distances (creating sins of omission) because he is hurt or angry or just feels uncomfortable around her critical words and attitudes, her verbal and emotional abuse. They are both doing wrong and contributing to the evil in their relationship. As a couple they have created a self centered and sin centered relationship. They are in what I call a loop which calls for a corporate confession and repentance. This is not linear having only one cause, but both spouses are contributing to the problem, it is circular. Both of them need to see their parts and be accountable before God to not sin and then do what is right. The more enmeshed they are the more their behavior is based on each other rather than a relationship with God and what he requires of them. David demonstrated his depth of spirituality when Saul went from honoring him to trying to kill him. Saul had become jealous and insecure and did not turn his heart to God and seek to have faith. David has lots of opportunity to betray Saul and even kill him to protect himself, but instead honors him and trades good for evil. He trusts God to judge between them.

When Saul is looking to kill David God delivers Saul into David's hand in a cave where David and his men were hiding from him. Saul was in the cave to relieve himself but instead of David killing Saul he just cuts a piece of Saul's robe off. After Saul leaves the cave David confronts Saul and tells him that he could have killed him but did not and holds up the piece of robe to prove it. He says to Saul, "May the Lord judge between us."(1 Samuel 24:12) David is saying that God is a judge who will be just and

righteous and David can and will trust him rather than taking things into his own hands to protect himself and alleviate his own anxiety about Saul threatening him. This is huge when it comes to faith because David trusts God as a judge who hates sin, so he can be godly and loving and do what is right. It is God as a sovereign judge who renders judgment that grants David the faith in his relationship with Saul, rather than being full of fear and anger. This is David's strength he is a great man of faith who actively trusts God in his life!

Paul picks up on this in his writing to the Roman church and says, "Never pay back evil with evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace – (unity with everyone.) Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back." Says the Lord. (Romans 12:17-19) Here is the New Testament belief that God will judge sin and the exhortation not to judge and then be a part of that evil. Peter brings this up when exhorting believers to suffer well. He uses Christ as an example of trusting that God is a judge. "For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps. He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly." (1 Peter 2:21-23) Christ made Himself vulnerable and suffered well and was not controlled by His anxiety but by His faith in a just judge, His father. As a Christian counselor I rarely see this level of faith in families. David does not hesitate to trust God himself or humbly call Saul to accountability before God. I do not see these things practiced much in the faith of the church today, but this is our call as believers. Are you trading evil for evil in a relationship and justifying what you do based on the other person's sin?

The issue of the coming of the Kingdom is that all evil will be gone. Whether that evil is in the individual in the form of personal sin or corporate sins like systemic evil all will be eliminated in the coming reign of Jesus. When heaven comes to earth evil will not exist there, "nothing evil will be allowed to enter..." (Revelations 21:27) That sanctification process started when the King came to earth and brought the Kingdom of God with Him. When we confess our sins He is making us new and has made us new creatures in our relationship with Him. His judgment is good and for the purpose of eliminating sin and evil forever!

CORPORATE CONFESSION OF SIN

In the Old Testament there are corporate calls for the confession of sin! On the Day of Atonement the priest – Aaron was to confess all the "wickedness, rebellion and sins of the people of Israel." (Leviticus 16:21) He did this while transferring the sin and guilt onto the two goats by laying on his hands signifying the transference of sin from the people to the goats. This was to make the people right with God and rid them of their sin. What would happen today if we recognized and dealt with sin corporately? We have just experienced a huge recession which many saw as a consequence of corporate sin in America. Jim Collins in his book, "How the Mighty Fall," says that "hubris and greed" were the main causes of this down turn. He is not a prophet but speaks with the voice of a prophet calling sinners to account for their wrongs; interesting role for an author, professor and business consultant from Stanford.

Collins critique was that the business community got greedy and sold mortgages to people who could not really afford them. That government became self righteous and arrogant trying to move the poor into their own housing through policy rather than working a process that would have helped them to develop competency. "...But there is a risk to manage: having an almost righteous sense of one's values and purpose ("we are the good guys") can perhaps make a company more vulnerable.... Fannie Mae's missionary zeal for expanding the American dream of home ownership to as many as possible contributed, in part, to its arrogance, its pursuit of growth, and even its increased risk profile. Whenever people begin to confuse the nobility of their cause with the goodness and wisdom of their actions- "We're good people in pursuit of a noble cause, and therefore our decisions are good and wise"- they can perhaps more easily lead themselves astray. Bad decisions made with good intentions are still bad decisions." ("How the Mighty Fall,"Pg 148) There are many sins of virtue in the Bible, but we often miss them as religious people. There is a good book on this down turn called the "Harbinger" by Cahn that relates God's judgment to a lack of corporate confession and repentance in America.

6b The Judgment of God – "...that they may not drown in the flood waters of judgment."

This is obviously a reference to the great flood. Where God was sorry he created humanity because of all the evil they did. God vows to destroy everyone in a flood except Noah and his family because "Noah was a righteous man, the only blameless person living on earth at the time, and he walked in close fellowship with God." (Genesis 6:9) All the people of Noah's day could see Noah building this great boat but did not repent and follow God. There is a time factor in this verse, "while there is still time." God is patient but if a person does not repent after being warned God's judgment will come and it is then too late. Often people interpret God's patience as permission, when judgment does not fall immediately after sin is committed. God is slow to anger and full of loving kindness, but he has limits and warns us about them. Once God's judgment falls it cannot be taken back. This is a stern warning! A wake up call! Warnings about sin cannot be minimized; Jesus had some of the sternest warnings over sin, even though He brought forgiveness of sin to the world through His love and sacrifice. Years ago I worked with a man who seriously injured another man while driving drunk. He kept saying I did not think this could happen to me. "Why me!" was his groan from this terrible accident where he maimed this other man for life and now had to live with this horrible consequences of his drunk driving. He had terrible regret that he had ever been a "drunk driver." I have heard hundreds of bad stories from the abuse of alcohol and then the secondary abuse and neglect of others. David knew the consequences of his sin and took God's judgment very seriously. This is a call again to take sin in our lives seriously so judgment does not fall on us, but also not so seriously that we are morbidly introspective and full of fear. We have to make sure that we do not try to make sin so manageable that we are denying the sin in our lives, and therefore missing the sin that is controlling our behavior at times. Religious people have a tendency to define sin as worldly or fleshly sins, sexual, abortion, homosexuality, adultery, fornication, pornography and minimize religious sins. Worldly believers tend to define sin as being religious sins, judgmentalism, self righteousness, exclusivism, religious arrogance and then minimize worldly sins. Each culture may normalize its sin and give a pass. In their sphere of influence that may blind them to their own sins, which may create severe consequences whether from sins of omission or from sins of commission.

SEX AND CREATION

Before we move into the more grace part of this psalm I want to go back to God's intention in creation. Sometimes because of the fall, sin and the consequences of sin, we vilify good things. It has been said that sin is just the twisting of the good so it is no longer recognizable. I was listening to a pastor this week who said, "How many of you were told while growing up that sex is dirty, filthy and awful, so save it for the one you love." This may sound crazy and he was trying to be funny, but I have had many Christians come to counseling who have had these kinds of problems in their marriages. A few years ago I had a pastor's wife come see me, who constantly said no to her husband when he approached for sex. She said that she would feel guilty and dirty if she gave in to his advances. So the only time they would have sex is when she felt like it and initiated it herself. Her focus on abstinence in her adolescents made her feel good about herself when she said no and kept her boundaries and when she yielded to her boyfriend's advances she felt very guilty. The pastor who spoke made a simple statement that His belief is that the church often values purity more than marriage. In other words we value not sinning more than God's blessings in creation. The weird thing about faith is that what at one time is sin, sex outside of marriage one context, in another context is God's grace and blessing, sex inside of marriage becomes a good thing, even a part of obedience to God.

In science we know that the brain is flexible, like plastic. We can change our orientation in different contexts. The study of this is called neuroplasticity. If we are too rigid in our definitions of sin and reactive we will take our definitions of sin too far. Like saying the air is dirty so you better not breathe. Then telling scary stories about how dangerous the air is and then ignoring the need to breathe. God wants us to have our needs met and have blessings in life. What is missed when we overreact is that God felt good about His creation and sex was a part of that good creation, it was good by His design. "Then God looked over all that He made, and saw that it was good!" (Genesis 1:29) The more that we have learned scientifically about the human body the more we find that God put a lot of effort into making sex a great experience. We have a brain with two pleasure centers that have to do with sex. The first is the arousal center that produces dopamine when we are sexually aroused. It is really about appetite and excitement in regards to sex. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter and is such an amazing drug that it can be very addicting; it may be one of the main factors in the addiction to pornography. Dopamine has to do with such illegal drugs as cocaine and crystal meth, because they flood the brain with dopamine, when they are used. That is what produces the good feelings. The second center or aspect is not about excitement but relaxation, maybe we could call it the calming center or reward center. During sex a little thing called oxytocin is released which is a hormone (it is a neuromodulator) that is called the trust hormone because it helps eliminate fear and promotes bonding. It is the hormone that helps us relax and feel calm, which is a really good thing. Psychologically bonding or attachment emotionally helps reduce anxiety. There are so many benefits physiologically, neurologically, bio-chemically, relationally, and in terms of general well being that God created by design. His creation is good but sin does tarnish it. David was a godly man but also a sinner, but we are not to throw the baby out with the bath water.

A healthy sexual relationship is based on safety that is why God has put sex in the context of marriage. That does not mean that marriage is a safe place for everyone, but that the boundaries of a marriage

relationship help protect people. Other boundaries on sin, abuse, neglect or hurtful things also protect a marriage relationship. Good boundaries can help create secure attachments like what God does for us with His grace. God's intention is really to bless people and His creation is so wonderful that we all can be in a state of worship, awe and thanksgiving when we are able to receive all His gifts. God wants us to have the freedom to enjoy life, but within the context of His will. This brings us the balance of protection and security as well as freedom and vitality.

THE SAFETY OF GOD'S COVENANT LOVE VS 7 FOR YOU ARE MY HIDING PLACE; YOU PROTECT ME FROM TROUBLE. YOU SURROUND ME WITH SONGS OF VICTORY."

Here comes the paradox of grace, right in the middle of all this warning about sin and judgment, the believer will find love, safety, embrace, and victory. God's faithfulness appears in the mist of man's unfaithfulness and sin. All of this in a context that sounds like what should happen is judgment, rejection, anxiety, and defeat. In the Old Testament every believer knew that the Old Covenant warned of judgment and that the consequence of sin was judgment. Here is the great wisdom of God. Jesus joins with us through his incarnation and demonstrates grace and yet this grace does not create collusion, an agreement to accept sin. He validates our existence without saying we are ok. This is one of the most difficult social skills for people. How do we join and not give cheap grace or collude?

Part of this collusion is from our innocence or nativity in regards to sin, in that families tell us what is normal-ok and what is not normal or ok. We cannot know and we don't know what we don't know. We gain knowledge of how the world works first from our families. They are the first social structure to create a person's culture, telling us what is good and bad, right and wrong. In other words our view of sin comes first from what our families view as sinful or not sinful. Only God and His word can define sin effectively through the working of His Spirit in us. Cheap grace is minimizing or normalizing sin. I had a series of families from one ethnic group in the 1980's that normalized incest. The men were expected to molest the younger women in the family and it was accepted. Alcoholism was also normalized so when Christians from this culture got sober I found many of them cutting off their families because they could not fellowship with their families and stay sober. When the laws began to change over molests some of these men went to prison. What had been normalized in the family was now seen as wrong and had serious consequences with the offense becoming an illegal issue in the broader culture. In families there is often a parent who is inclusive, accepting and empathetic. Their job is to make family members feel loved and accepted, which is wonderful. The downside of this role is that it often gives a person cheap grace because they are colluding with sin from God's point of view. They don't want you to feel bad or guilty or shame even when you should be ashamed. Like this example of incest. In counseling with a couple just lately the wife was complaining that her husband was verbally abusive, but he couldn't see it. As we talked about sin he said, "My family normalized putting each other down, it was not wrong in our family." We need to know how we affect each other to love well, but sometimes it shames us when we hear the affect we are having on others. However, we now know that some levels of shame and guilt are healthy and help socialize people. We use shame in restorative justice work to sensitize criminals to how they have affected their victims, they have to listen to their victim's story of hurt and pain, so they can heal and do their amends work. When we are broken and face our sin we often lose a

sense of innocence or a sense of our own goodness becomes suspect. Loyalty to family often keeps us from a deeper loyalty to God, and even godliness.

In the Old Testament when Israel was off with God they were called to confess their sins and the sins of their parents. Why? "But at last my people will confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors for betraying me and being hostile toward me." (Leviticus 26:40) In the New Testament Jesus calls those who want to be disciples to value Him more than their family. "If you love your father or mother more than me, you are not worthy of being mine..." (Mathew 10:37) Why? Loyalty to family runs deep and is hard to break, but may keep us apart from God's will and his purposes.

Sin often causes us to distance from those who are sinning, but that can be wrong in the Kingdom. Jesus loved the sinner, but did not turn away from confronting the sin. That is very difficult to do well in our relationships. It usually invites fight or flight reactions or both. God's grace granted love, acceptance and forgiveness, not judgment. However without naming the problem we often just enable others. Jesus intentionally spent time with those who already knew they were sinners.

In the years I have been counseling I have worked with hundreds of addicts, those of us that struggle with addiction. Most addicts get sober when their primary enabler quits enabling. A spouse says, "I'm not willing to live with you any longer if you are going to drink." This again will be an over simplification of the process of interventions, but it will make the point. Sometimes it takes a stronger loyalty to health, godliness or the Lord to break a codependent loyalty to a spouse. When this confrontation happens it is usually resisted and argued with, but if the spouse is firm and yet loving many times an alcoholic spouse will do the hard work of getting sober and then maintaining sobriety. The spouse that enables often times lives for years believing their kindness is enough. Their love and loyalty will bring change. However grace that is inclusive can send the message that their sins are ok, if there is a lack of truth to clearly define what is not ok. Often family members are also afraid of losing the relationship. Kindness and tolerance alone doesn't bring change. This is where according to Dr. Volf, a call for the exclusion of sin and accountability may precede grace. A family members acceptance and over responsibility for another family members addiction is collusion, it is grace without truth. When sin is confronted, "If another believer sins, rebuke that person; then if the person repents, forgive..." (Luke 17:3) an intervention has taken place. This is the same strategy as a church discipline. Sin is named and confession and repentance is required in order for a member of the body to stay in fellowship. (1 Corinthians 5) This is not about being judgmental, but about holding others accountable for their sin. This in many areas is being lost in a post modern culture which values inclusion and shuns judgment or intolerance. However to see the process of sanctification going from the curse to the blessing, from thief to contributor, drunk to sober, debtor to generous giver, liar to person of integrity, violence to kindness, irresponsible to responsible the sins have to be named and excluded from our lives and the godliness of being a new creature in Christ put on. God's grace in Christ empowers us to put on the new and put off the old.

THE PARADOX OF GRACE

The paradox of grace is that under the Old Testament you got what you deserved, obedience brought blessings and disobedience brought curses. In the New Testament grace gives us what we do not deserve, we do not earn God's grace it is freely given and often given when there is no deserving of any good thing only a call for justice. This concept of God being on your side is secured in the New Testament by Christ's sacrifice and God's love, not by our perfect obedience.

"What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all... (Romans 8:31-32) It is the love of God that grants this grace and security in his sacrificial love.

When we get to the New Covenant we find great paradox. Instead of sin producing judgment, grace is offered, instead of Law producing righteousness it produces sin. Paul writes in Romans 5:20 "And the Law came in that the transgression might increase, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." This was opposite of the religious thinking of the day! So the solution to sin is not Law but grace and that is what is offered here, grace in the person of Jesus. God becomes David's hiding place, his safe place, his protection as he turns to God in confession he receives God's grace, not His judgment. Law makes demands on us to live righteously but shows us our failure to do so, then brings a punitive judgment! David was broken because he knew he was wrong and deserved punishment. Grace does not negate consequences. Law is about rules and what happens when you break the rules. Where the grace found in Jesus Christ, demonstrates God's love and empowers us to live righteously, to fulfill the demands of Jesus, in a relationship with Him. Grace does not entitle us to sin, but motives us to love and obey God. The New Covenant does not eliminate the will of God or the demands of Jesus; it empowers us to fulfill those demands through His love and the power of the Holy Spirit. Being righteous is still about making godly decisions and having integrity. Grace demonstrates God's unconditional love and offers complete forgiveness, but does not negate what Jesus requires of us. We have a relationship with Jesus, not a doctrine of grace and Jesus is clear that He expects us to heed His voice and obey. "Why do you call me Lord Lord and do not do what I say?...But the one who has heard, and has not acted accordingly is like the man who built a house upon the ground without any foundation;" (Luke 6:46&49) Jesus is an interesting mix of grace and truth, sometimes very demanding and sometimes very forgiving and loving. With the woman caught in adultery and brought to Jesus, He does not condemn her, even though the Law required she be stoned to death, he demonstrates grace. However neither does he give her a pass to keep on sinning, he says, "go and sin no more." Grace is so powerful and often difficult to receive. As we realize that we deserve judgment we are invited to receive His unmerited favor, His undeserved love. It is very humbling to us as we understand our sin and what should be coming to us, when we fall short. However grace is much more relational and so much less rule oriented, or punitive. If we are focused on rules the context of a situation does not count and many times is overlooked.

CONTEXT

Pastors learn to exegete the Word of God in seminary. In other words they learn to look at scripture in the context it was written. However we are not taught to learn the context of people's lives, to exegete

our congregations and as a Christian counselor I am often surprised at how much of people's story their pastors do not know. We are just learning from people like Dr. Ray Bakke that local churches need to exegete their neighborhoods if they are going to love their neighbors well. The city church also needs to learn the context of its city in order to see God's power and transformation at work. So context is extremely important, whether in teaching the Bible or doing ministry!

When we care about people and relationships we also want to know about the context of a person's life and have compassion on them because of that context. Mary came home dragging the other day and her mom asked her, "Did you eat your lunch?" "No mom I didn't eat my lunch!" says Mary. "Well then you are in trouble young lady!" "Does it matter that I gave my lunch to Johnny, he was hungry and his dad is out of work and the family is not buying groceries and he had not eaten any breakfast and didn't have a lunch so I gave him mine." Context counts! What could have been judged as irresponsibility now maybe judged as sacrificial love. This is a little like David who is called by God to be a great warrior, his vocation. He achieves fame by standing up to the enemies of Israel and killing Goliath as a boy, defending Israel's faith in God through his faith and courage. In this venue of David's life he learned to be noble, honorable, courageous and a hero in God's Kingdom. This is David's sphere of influence, his context, the place that he lives his life. This is where he learns about his faith, his meaningful context. God is to be found by all of us in the tasks, roles, relationships the contexts of our lives. David also finds it difficult, in this warrior sphere, where he is called into battle. In this place he comes to realize that "shedding blood" where the glory as a warrior has come to him, also can be a sin and that fact helps disqualify him from building a temple to his God. (1 Chronicles 22:8) If we are too judgmental towards David for his sins with Bathsheba and Uriah maybe it is also because we have a hard time relating to the context of his life. Have you been called to fight the enemies of God in hand to hand combat? Ever kill anyone with a sword? Ever feel very powerful and dominate around others? Ever have any trauma or PTSD from a battle? Was your life involved with competition-football or some sport where you fight to win? Some people are tempted in the area of power; while others are so sensitive they couldn't hurt a fly. Some people are tempted in the area of money, while others couldn't make money if they had to. Some people are tempted in the area of sex, while others are not even awake to sexual invitations. Temptation is also contextual, based on who you are and what your experience and background is. We all have a context that we live in and it can be extremely hard for others to understand our context. Being a great warrior was about having God's favor in battle for David that is where he learned God's call, deliverance, protection and faithfulness. That context is where he became a hero and spiritual leader. David's contribution as a great warrior created meaning and position for him. However David's sin may have also come from this context, becoming a conqueror and King was an open door to abusing his power. Every upside has a downside to it. That context for David is where he learned to trust his God and seek God's will, it was the context that he lived in and where his faith took root. Some people live in business and learn to find God there, but are also subject to the depravation of that sector. Some people live in the context of the church and learn about their faith in that context, but also are subject to the depravity of the religious community. Others live in the context of politics and seek to serve God in public service, but are subject to the depravity of that sector. Being judgmental is not just a religious sin. A few years ago Gabrielle Gifford was shot in our neighborhood. That afternoon I was invited to lead the community in a prayer vigil at the court house to bring healing to the whole community. There

were many media people there filming the service and asking why this happened. Our State was known for conflict especially political conflict, which was demonstrated by a lot of political party criticism and gossip. The forming of alliances that were vitriolic in their criticism of others outside their party. The news media was sure this was a political shooting spurred on by the levels of judgment expressed in our community. My belief was that this shooting was from a mentally ill person. However, perhaps the sin of judgment, as all sins do, invites evil and creates a context in which evil can thrive. After the memorial many political leaders confessed they had been too critical and would become more "civil." They did confess their sins of building alliances on hurt, anger and criticism. It is easy to see others sins and want to withdraw from them, or become critical of them. Some people in the church are hiding from the sins of the world. Some people in the world are hiding from the sins of the church. Other's sins are often repugnant to us. There is no area of life free from the fall and the depravity of man. There is no place where we can hide from evil or sin except in the presence of our God. There is also no place or sphere in life where a person cannot grow in their faith and see God's grace if they seek Him. There are no roles or spheres of influence that are insignificant in the Kingdom of God, His presence is everywhere. There is no sacred or secular in God's Kingdom. Our life is not about being perfect, committed, good or safe, but about knowing God. The danger is that sometimes we may mistake the church for God, political mission for His Kingdom, or financial gain for His favor. Most of us normalize our context and take direction from that context, "this is how everyone does it." Our roles, tasks and purposes maybe defined more by, "this is how it is done" than by hearing God's voice. For David the kings around him collected horses, silver and gold and women, "isn't that the way kings do it?" That may not be God's will, God's way! All true believers struggle with being in the world, but not of the world. Most of us as we go through life also find that we get stained by the roles and domains that we function in and realize we have not always looked to God for guidance, we have become too entangled with our worldly context and are often more loyal to a worldly order than God's Kingdom order. A godly mother may find she has idolized one of her children and is guilty of sin even though she has been very spiritual as a mother. His ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts. Battles were not always won by horses, chariots and mighty warriors, sometimes God had his army blow trumpets, break clay jars, sing songs, and the battles were won only by the Lord, without any fighting at all. The power was only God's power. The believer was to trust and obey their God in their context as they sought His will and have done their parts in their call.

In facing his sin David finds safety, God's embrace in his life. That embrace protects him from himself and any evil that would come to destroy him. God was very redemptive and David knew that his redeemer lived. As a person embraces their own sin they often know powerlessness and know their need for a savior. Paul knew this when he wrote, "Wretched man that I am! Who will free me from the body of (sin) of this death?" (Romans 7:24) No matter how hard he tried to be godly he could not completely escape his own depravity. However Paul found victory in Christ and what Christ's power could do for him, he knew his redeemer lived. David also found a grace that gave him victory over sin, and self control through his relationship with God. "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty. And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city." (Proverbs 16:32) David was learning that life was not about having power, but yielding to God's power in submission. However that resulted in victory in his life callings as well, he did capture cities and win battles. The result is joy, being filled with

songs of victory even when facing the negative consequences of his sin. God's love, protection and blessing surrounded him in the form of God's goodness and grace "all the days of his life" as he **sought** to live in God's presence.

Do you believe God knows the context of your life and cares about it?

WE ARE BUT DUST

It is really hard to organize dust! To put structure and discipline into dust can seem like an effort in futility! There are many people who lack resources, discipline and structure in their lives and they are usually the most vulnerable to trials. One little wind gust and the dust castle comes apart, stability is not our strong suite! In other words God knows and understands our human weaknesses that we are but dust and only live on earth for a short period of time. Ever think of making a pile of dust into something of real substance. He is not surprised by our sinfulness and is able to accept "the way things are" better than any of us, for He knows how things really are in each and every person's life, what we need and are lacking. He could bring the swiftest judgment upon all of us but He is a God of grace. He hates sin and evil, but has a plan of redemption and restoration that is hard for us to see. Most of us struggle with accepting the way the world is, especially when evil touches our lives. God is at peace and has lots of love even with all of us who fall way short of His glory. Here is how David describes Him in Psalm 103:8-14.

"The Lord is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever. (Thank you, Jesus!) He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. (God's grace) For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west. The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. For he knows how weak we are; he knows we are only dust." Psalm 103:8-14

Just lately my son brought home two puppies destructo one and destructo two. They are so cute otherwise they would be dead. They are full of life and get into everything chewing up anything they can get their mouths on. I also have two grandsons that could fall under the same category destructo one and destructo two. They are cute as well and exude life and passion, but also very mischievous. This is a season in their lives where I think only a God of grace could be patient and slow to anger. I replaced all the irrigation system the puppies ripped up and two days later they escaped their pen and ripped it up again, with no apparent moral reproach in their little consciences. I wanted to call down the wrath of God like the disciples, but no God requires me to love my enemies or at least my son's puppies. Just kidding sort of!

God knows the seasons of our lives and most of the time shows us love and acceptance. He can understand children, teenagers, young adults, adults and the elderly better than any of us. He knows the weaknesses of the mentally ill and their strengths. He made the different personalities we see in our families and communities and he has a purpose for us all. He understands birth order and the overly responsible first child as well as the manipulating baby of the family. He made the oppositional child as well as the compliant child and has set eternity in all of our hearts. God is not surprised by us and "will

not constantly accuse us” of our sin. We would all be puddles of protoplasm if he did. He loves us well and does not count our differences or our stages of life as sin.

DIFFERENCES ARE NOT SIN

In the book of Ephesians both sin and differences bring division. We as human beings tend to be very myopic and define good and bad within the narrow parameters of our little lives. We are not only ego centric but also ethnocentric. What our culture defines as good or bad we reference in our judgments. This causes us to miss God’s bigger picture so the inclusions of scripture expand our definitions of what is good or acceptable. In Ephesians Paul is confronting the racism and prejudices of the Jews and exhorting them to be inclusive of the gentiles. Ephesians also covers the five offices of the church or the different roles and communicates that they are there to complement each other even though they are different. Often the purposes of one role oppose the purposes of another’s role. In the book of Galatians Paul says, “There is neither male or female...” we are all to be included through faith in Christ even though we are different in gender, role or function. For example the role of a mother maybe to nurture and protect, while the father’s role maybe to discipline and launch. These roles can cause a lot of conflict because of their different purposes; launching and protecting are often antithetical to each other. Hopefully there will be a lack of rigidity in role and each person can see and embrace the functions of different parts of the body of Christ. We have to be a little less self centered to do that, and be careful not to make our differences sin.

LOOKING TO GOD FOR GUIDANCE VS 8-9 THE LORD SAYS,“I WILL GUIDE YOU ALONG THE BEST PATHWAY FOR YOUR LIFE. I WILL ADVISE YOU AND WATCH OVER YOU. DO NOT BE LIKE A SENSELESS HORSE OR MULE THAT NEEDS A BIT AND BRIDLE TO KEEP IT UNDER CONTROL.”

The assumption is that the Lord will guide if you are open to His guidance! He loves you very much and wants the best for you. Are you looking every day and in all situations for His will? Do you listen for his voice? Are you searching His word for guidance?

“Your Word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.” (Psalm 119:105) In the Old Testament God’s will was often discerned by listening to a prophet like Nathan in this story. However in the New Testament God’s Word is given in the scriptures and guidance is given by the Holy Spirit who leads us into all Truth. For each New Testament believer God through the Holy Spirit is very personal, but we need to be doing our part which I believe is to “seek God with our whole heart.” This is an exhortation by David and found in many places in the Old Testament. In the New Testament James says, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” (James 4:8) James starts this exhortation by quoting a Psalm, “Though the Lord is great, he cares for the humble, but keeps his distance from the proud.” (Psalm 138:6) The proud are people who do not need God. They live independently of God! As C S Lewis says, There are two kinds of people, one where God says ok have it your way and others who say, “thy will be done.” Guidance is about seeking His will and trusting His word when you receive it. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own (independent) understanding. Seek His will in all you do, and He will show you which path to take.” Proverbs 3:5-6

David's story is one where he constantly looks for God's will and guidance. He truly is God centered and expects God to speak to him. There is a story in his life where he is again experiencing some of the negative consequences from this sin. Absalom, David's son betrays him and attempts to take over his Kingdom. David leaves Jerusalem in humiliation and confusion, as Absalom attempts a coup. As he is leaving, a man named Shimei curses David and throws rocks at him and his mighty men. One of the warriors wants to go up and cut off his head and stop the accusations and harassment, but David tells him no. Seems like a good idea to me. "Maybe the Lord has told him to curse me, who are you to stop him." (2 Samuel 16:10) David consistently wanted to know what God was doing in his life and what he was to do, whether to submit to some suffering or to step up and fight. I am amazed that in a time of suffering and brokenness David is surrendered enough to accept more suffering if that is God's will. Most of us want comfort, love and even cheap grace. He looked for God in all his circumstances, even if the circumstances were hard. David humbled himself before God by seeking to submit to God's will, a foretaste of the cross of Christ.

David's warning, I think for believers is that God will discipline those he loves and put a bit in our mouth to govern our behaviors when we are ignoring Him and His will. If we do not gain self control through the Holy Spirit God will discipline us and bring us under control. I have seen this many times in counseling others. One time I had a couple who were both having affairs. As I sat and listened to them I heard both of them justifying their behaviors based on the others misbehavior, loops. I exhorted them both that if they continued to ignore God, both were Christians, they would bring judgment on themselves. I was surprised at what had come out of my mouth, for that is not what I would usually say. The next week the husband was involved in a bad accident that ended his ability to even have affairs. It seemed so sudden and harsh. When I spoke to him a month later in the hospital his first words were, "God put me in my place." He seemed thankful rather than bitter.

It is better to seek God's guidance in all things and know His love for us rather than His discipline. This is what David is exhorting us to do in this verse. Don't be a stubborn horse or immovable mule!

GOD'S COVENANT LOVE – VS 10 MANY SORROWS COME TO THE WICKED, BUT UNFAILING LOVE SURROUNDS THOSE WHO TRUST THE LORD!

There is usually a contrast in the psalms between the righteous and the wicked. Here the wicked again will be depressed, sorrowful or sad; where those who trust the Lord will be surrounded by God's love, His unfailing love-Hesed, His covenant love. The world view is that those who practice wickedness will be punished; again a warning to live a godly and righteous life. There are consequences for our behaviors and often we have to change, our behavior, our habits, our relationships and our structures to experience the love of God rather than His discipline. For the lazy man to be prosperous he starts by defining being lazy as a sin and repents by becoming industrious and hard working. There is a process of building a new structure through confession and repentance into his life. For dust to move to glory and honor rather than shame and judgment, we need to do our work. Without that new character structure of being industrious and hard working the blessings of God are withheld, there are many conditional blessings. No one can make those changes for you or rescue you from what is your responsibility. God is no respecter of persons, in other words we all have to do our work. We will reap what we sow and being

lazy brings poverty. "Lazy people are soon poor; hard workers get rich." (Proverbs 10:4) The covenant of grace does not negate personal responsibility. "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will reap." (Galatians 6:7) In running organizations over the years I had many employees. As an employer, you quickly see who comes to work to just put in the hours and who is a diligent worker. Often employees who do the work and not the job, lack awareness of what is required to get a job done and they also lack the awareness of whether they are an asset or creating a deficit. When we do not know our weaknesses-sin we are not as valuable as others who have confessed their sin and repented and really are diligent, industrious and there to do a good job. Those who do a good job read social systems well and become aware of how to become good workers and valuable people. Life is not about them, they are there to serve. Is this just about moral failures like laziness?

LACK OF RESOURCES

Why do some people learn faster and better than others? There is tremendous complexity to this question but choice is only one factor related to God's blessings and sin. There are other factors that are environmental, that contribute to their sin. Deprivation contributes to depravation! Most of the people I have worked with who struggle with debt have come from families where they were not trained to handle money well, often their families struggled with poor values and financial responsibilities. They were financially illiterate a form of deprivation, lack of knowledge and skill. One couple, who was struggling, loudly proclaimed six months into our counseling on debt reduction and wealth development, "we did not know any of this stuff!"

The poor often have to be converted to believe that living for today, survival mode is wrong. That deferring immediate gratification leads to blessings in the future and that there is a future. The Christian faith is focused on delayed gratification for the greater reward that comes from God. "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." Hebrews 11:6

Often the environment of the poor is oppressive and makes the poor feel powerless and hopeless. In healthy families children are empowered through discipline, education and encouragement, in unhealthy families they are abused and neglected. All families have some good and some bad, but they fall on a continuum with the unhealthy having more negatives and the healthy more positives. The developmental process is attended to for children in healthy families and neglected in unhealthy families; some families systems are just healthier than others for many reasons. When I was in graduate school there was a woman getting her doctorate that had been severely neglected after her father died. She went to live with her grandparents. One of her teachers observed that she had energy on Monday, but as the week went on she became more and more lifeless. An investigation went on and it was discovered that her grandparents only feed her on the weekends. She was put in foster care. When asked how with her background she ended up achieving so much she said. "My Dad would hold me up in front of him and tell me he loved me and that I was special." That was the message that gave her hope and that she held on to that empowered her to press forward in her life. In this psalm God is saying I love you and you are special and I will be faithful with my covenant love to be committed to you. Nothing can separate you from my commitment to love you as you belong to Christ, even your short

comings. However you are required to trust me, and to do your part and that is where many of my blessings will come. Those that teach that all the blessings of God are unconditional keep believers children and thinking magically rather than thinking as our faith teaches us.

One of the keys to empowerment is personal responsibility and in families handing that baton on it often a difficult process. One family I had was struggling with a daughter who had many learning disabilities. They had come to me after I wrote a book on strong willed kids and asked for my help. They were in a negative loop and the catalyst for their power struggle was grades. The parents were right in wanting their child to get good grades, but wrong in the process of facilitating this outcome. As we worked together they disengaged from their loop, but nothing changed their daughter was still getting bad grades. They were not arguing over them anymore, but neither was there improvement. One day after about one year, they sat down with this child and said, "we love you whether or not you get good grades, however the car we were going to get you is contingent on you bringing all your grades up to A's and B's. For some reason this teenager had a v8 moment and came to their senses and in six weeks turned all their grades around and was getting all A's and B's. The advocate at school called the parents and asked what they did because this was the quickest turn around they had ever seen. The teenager had taken the baton, caught the vision, owned the responsibility and accomplished the task. Praise the Lord! The blessings of God were manifest!

OBEDIENCE BRINGS BLESSINGS VS 11 SO REJOICE AND BE GLAD, ALL YOU WHO OBEY HIM! SHOUT FOR JOY, ALL YOU WHOSE HEARTS ARE PURE!

This is the ending verse and it ends with the call to rejoice and be glad. Here in the middle of a hard story of sin and the difficult consequences of sin we are called as was David to rejoice and be glad. Why? Because there is hope! There is redemption in Christ. Sins and its consequences are not the end of the story! What the devil steals the Lord will restore. Jesus has defeated the enemy and He wants us to have life and life abundant. So rejoice and be glad, God is good and he desires to bring us His blessings. He has freed us from the curses and calls us to be glad. This is also an issue of faith, where we are to trust Him.

I have seen so many men who have sold themselves into sin and bondage when they were young. As they come back to Christ they start from a position of guilt and shame and often struggle to be free from worldly sins, lust, drugs, alcohol, materialism, greed, pride and other such besetting sins. When they get married they often victimize their wives with the consequences of these sins and lose credibility as a spiritual leader. Their struggle to gain what they already have positionally often keeps them from leading. They often do not feel respected and have not earned that respect through being men of honor. The consequences of sin are discouraging and send messages that all is lost and life may appear hopeless and God's word untrue, testing their faith. They often do not have Kingdom structure in their lives-godliness, the life of Christ is not yet formed in them. The verse "Why do you call me Lord, Lord and do not do what I say," calls them to question their faith, because of the consistence of failure in their lives and with that their wives criticism. Obedience only comes through dependency on Christ through time, to bring that structure into their lives. One of the men I worked with for years was a dead-beat dad. When he married his wife he had already fathered two children out of wedlock and

owed back child support. As a couple they struggled tremendously financially. This husband was breaking under the weight of his guilt and shame, but he was working hard to get out of the ditch he had dug for himself and his family. This is a long story, but since I am writing I will again tell the short version and make the complex simple. For years I had worked with him to bring him to a point of paying off the almost \$40,000 he owed in back child support, but we were making little progress or slowly making progress. His wife had gotten a job at an airline, and booked the family's first international vacation to go see a family member who was a missionary in a third world country. When the husband called to see about getting his passport he found out he was black listed because of the dead-beat dad debt that he owed. It was a part of the consequences of his worldly sins from his youth. Sin brings the curse and obedience the blessing. This again victimized his wife and family. He told her he would take care of it; after all it was his responsibility! She found herself again discouraged thinking his past sins would ruin their vacation, but she was godly and surrendered her expectations to God. His experience was that he usually could not get a hold of the people in charge of his debt, but he would call anyway. To his surprise, on Monday a couple weeks before the trip they were to go on, a woman answered the phone and he spoke to her about getting his passport. She said, "It would be a miracle for him to get the passport before the day they were to leave." He said, "I have a big God." He had become a man of faith, doing his part in leading his family through trusting God and taking responsibility. He thought he had about 6 to 8 thousand dollars left on his debt. The next day she called and said, "You only owe \$550 on your debt, can you pay that?" He could not believe that the number was so small, and he had that much saved for the trip. He sent her the money and she said the debt was **gone!** But he was on a black list in Washington DC and she did not have authority there, but would do what she could. On Friday he got his passport. He called her and thanked her and said, "I told you I have a big God." I saw him on Saturday and he cried as he told me this story, God was so good to him. God had vindicated him and been faithful to bless his faith and obedience. He was empowered by his God. He needed money for the trip and I had been trying to give him a micro-loan for years to help him pay off the debt. Now I was able to give him one to be able to bless his family and take them on a much needed vacation. He has now paid off the micro-loan and they had a great vacation. He has been rejoicing and is glad because God is redemptive and it is true that God gave him the position of spiritual leader as a servant leader in his home.

Obedience is not a call to duty but a call to destiny! For we have been called to His Kingdom where His will is to be done on earth as it is in heaven. This is not a call to focus on our righteousness but a call where His righteousness takes root in our lives, sometimes slowly. This is not about our strength, but about His grace that makes us strong as we admit our weaknesses and are "completely honest." As we put off the old and put on the new, God's blessings come upon us and we are full of joy! Obedience brings blessings. This man's tears were tears of joy because he had learned to trust and obey God as a new creature in Christ even though his past life yelled another story to him. Sometimes his wife also told him that other story, not this time.

The shouting for joy when we have a pure heart is not about a sinless life, but about being right with God through confession of sin and Christ's work in forgiving us of that sin, and creating a new life in us through faith, a life of honor and not one of shame. It is a messy journey sometimes with great victories

and sometimes with discouraging and shameful defeats. Having a pure heart is about being right in our relationship with God, self and others so that there is no hardheartedness in us.

RESTORATIVE PROCESSES

In the beginning of this commentary I mentioned the story of Zacchaeus and the Lord. This psalm focuses on the vertical relationship between David and God, but sin affects our relationship with God, others and ourselves. David's confession is "I have sinned against the Lord." (2 Samuel 12:13) David maybe over-spiritualizing in that he has sinned against many others also. How is Uriah's family going to take this murder, will Bathsheba ever get over it? What about the community who expects David to be a godly, trustworthy King. We cannot ignore our horizontal relationships and be right with God. David has done wrong but will he only seek forgiveness from God and not make his wrongs right with those he has violated. Not that you could ever adequately make amends for murder. In the Old Testament it is said that sin can even pollute the land. In the story of Zacchaeus the restorative process is seen because Zacchaeus is willing to work in reconciling himself to God and others and therefore himself as well. When sin expresses itself in our lives it tears away at the very fabric of our lives, which are the relationships in which we live and breathe. When we do not acknowledge this and neglect human relationships in the New Covenant it becomes questionable whether we really even love and have a relationship with God. "If someone says, "I love God," but hates a brother or sister, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see?" (1 John 4:20) Over the years I have met many Christians who over spiritualize, they have a good devotional life, but very poor social skills, true spirituality brings the imperatives of the Kingdom into each of the communities that we live in, or according to John it is not true faith, but fraudulent faith. This is why we have stories like Zacchaeus.

ZACCHAEUS - RESTORATIVE

"Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich. He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way.

When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quickly come down! I must be a guest in your home today!"

Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. But the people were displeased. "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner," they grumbled. Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, "I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!"

Jesus responded, "Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. For the son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost." Luke 19:1-9

Here the story shows ownership of sin, repentance and amends work the three main components of restoration in a broken relationship. Zacchaeus was alienated from the Jews because he was the chief tax collector, a man who betrayed his people by allying with the enemy. Betrayal is a huge sin in that trust and loyalty make up the fabric of human relationships. Yet the grace of Christ embraces him in his sin and that kindness invites him to a restorative process. Sin makes life unsafe and increases the anxiety of those affected or threatened by it! Therefore it is hard for us to be truly redemptive in our relationships were we are exposed to others sins. This was the case with Zacchaeus and the Jews, so it was easier for the Jews to judge and vilify him rather than be gracious and redemptive. I'm not sure we are any different without the Life of Christ being manifest in us. We are very afraid of perpetrators in our culture and many of them are unsafe and marginalized.

We need to be able to face our sin and confess it to God, ourselves and others. We need forgiveness and the debts we create with God can only be paid for, by Him and they have been through Christ's death on the cross. However, when we do not ask others for forgiveness when we have wronged them we are saying I don't care how I've hurt you and love is broken, a relationship torn. We can't say oh well I'm right with God. When we understand the gravity of our sin we need to repent, change our behavior and all that goes with that. Jesus says that we are not to even go worship unless we have first attempted to reconcile with someone we have offended. How many of us go to church ignoring broken relationships, hoping we are ok with God? Without repentance we are not safe people! Many times in a relationship confession will begin to mean nothing without a turning from bad behaviors. Alcoholics often times know when they have acted out and that there will be consequences so they apologize for the hundredth time, but it is hollow without sobriety, which is repentance. The same is true for any sin that is repeated in relationships. Sin brings distance without confession and repentance because it hurts others and ruins relationships. Safety allows for trust to be rebuilt. Making amends demonstrates that we value the person and the relationship. When a person in the Old Testament stole a sheep they were to repay the victim four sheep. Why? The restitution was steep because they had to invest heavily because they started in a hole. They were proving they were respectful, safe, valued the other and were trustworthy. This last issue of restoration, amends work, was to facilitate reconciliation, which is the restoration of trust. Sin can eliminate trust, so a restorative process, not just forgiveness is required to restore trust to relationships. If you are interested in greater treatment of the reconciliation process see chapter ten from my Common Grace book.

Just a closing story to add a little levity to the restorative process: One year I had two pastors stand me up for lunch six times. I was running a Christian counseling agency and believed it was essential to meet with the pastors where I was counseling their people. After the sixth time the one pastor stood me up, his wife sent a fruit basket with him to make amends for his irresponsibility. She was attempting to mend the tears he had caused in our relationship. I smiled and did book another lunch with him. Do we know what we do wrong? Do we care about our sinfulness? Are we aware of our sins? Are we committed to our relationships? What would life be like if we all took responsibility to make our wrongs right? If we were forgiving? If we saw the need to earn respect and trust and then maintain it? Not childishly believing we are entitled to it? Are there relationships you need to make right, even when the other person did more wrong to you than you did to them?

CONCLUSION

“To speak of sin by itself, to speak of it apart from the realities of creation and grace, is to forget the resolve of God. God wants shalom (God’s order to life) and will pay any price to get it back. Human sin is stubborn, but not as stubborn as the grace of God and not half so persistent, not half so ready to suffer to win its way. Moreover, to speak of sin by itself is to misunderstand its nature: sin is only a parasite, a vandal, a spoiler. Sinful life is a partly depressing, partly ludicrous *caricature* of genuine human life. To concentrate on our rebellion, defection, and folly – to say to the world, “I have some bad news and I have some bad news” – is to forget that the center of the Christian religion is not our sin but our Savior. To speak of sin without grace is to minimize the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the fruit of the Spirit, and the hope of shalom.

But to speak of grace without sin is surely no better. To do this is to trivialize the cross of Jesus Christ, to skate past all the struggling by good people down the ages to forgive, accept, and rehabilitate sinners, including themselves, and therefore to cheapen the grace of God that always comes to us with blood on it. What had we thought the ripping and writhing on Golgotha were all about? To speak of grace without looking squarely at these realities, without painfully honest acknowledgment of our own sin and its effects, is to shrink grace to a mere embellishment of the music of creation, to shrink it down to a mere grace note. In short, for the Christian church (even in its recently popular seeker services) to ignore, euphemize, or otherwise mute the lethal reality of sin is to cut the nerve of the gospel. For the sober truth is that without full disclosure of sin, (complete honesty) the gospel of grace becomes impertinent, unnecessary, and finally uninteresting.” (Plantinga, *Not the Way It Is Supposed to Be*” pg 199)