

Section 3, Week 19
Home Page Summaries, Days 2-5

Day 2

God's Identity

Because He Forgives

Marketers will tell you that the greatest advertisement for a product or service is a satisfied customer. In a manner of speaking, the same is true in the spiritual life. King David of Israel highly recommends the God of Israel to meet a certain type of spiritual need. You'll understand David's satisfaction when you read his testimony in Psalm 51 (p. xxx).

Day 3

My Identity

Be Happy, Be Forgiven

Take a poll among your friends on this question: "What does it mean to be truly happy?" You'll probably get as many different answers as the number of people you ask. But if the psalmist David was part of your poll, you would get a clear, unashamed answer. Discover how to be as happy as David by reading his answer in Psalm 32:1-1 (p. xxx).

Day 4

Impact

A Powerful Alliance

A hard spiritual lesson to learn is that confession of sin does not always remove the consequences of sin. Why doesn't God reverse the effects of sin once we've confessed? Israel learned the hard way that sin carries a significant price. Discover why forgiveness with consequences is better than the alternative in Numbers 14:17-23 (p. xxx).

Day 5

Implication

Saying What God Says

The great creeds of the Christian church are often called "confessions," meaning that believers "say the same thing" generation after generation. Confessions are also vitally important in our relationship with God; we learn to describe life like he does. Discover what happens when we say the same thing God says by reading 1 John 1:9 (p. xxx).

Section 3, Week 19, Day 1

Micah 7:18-20

356 words

The Promise

Who Is a God Like You?

Micah 7:18-20 A hardened, sword-wielding, South American slave trader is on a pilgrimage to find forgiveness. Dragging behind him a huge rope net filled with the remnants of his past—swords, armor, guns and the like—the penitent sinner climbs cliffs and slogs through dripping jungles in an effort to reach the simple jungle Indians whose tribe he had decimated—and find pardon at their feet. He punishes, and nearly kills, himself by dragging the huge weighted net behind him, but it is symbolic of who he was and the burden he carries. As a man who has lived by vengeance and the sword, his penance is to punish himself until he can reach those who can forgive him.

When finally the trader, accompanied by the priests who are working with the tribe, reaches the Indians, he is almost dead from the exertion of his penance. The Indian leader who recognizes the slave trader approaches with knife in hand. On his knees from exhaustion, the trader doesn't know whether he will live or die. But instead of cutting the trader's throat, the Indian cuts the thick rope that has bound the net to the man and pushes the remnants of his past over a cliff into a boiling river below. He is forgiven by those against whom he had sinned.

While this portrayal of forgiveness is powerful—from *The Mission*, the Cannes Film Festival's Best Picture of 1986—Hollywood didn't invent the concept. God has been extending forgiveness for millennia. Once, at a time when Israel had made slave traders look noble by comparison (“the best of them is like a brier, the most upright worse than a thorn hedge”—ouch!—Micah 7:4), God still forgave them. Then and now, man marvels at the nature of God to forgive: “Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives . . . ?” (Micah 7:18).

Primitive Indians may have hurled the tools of a slave trader over a cliff into a river, but God hurls “all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.” He delights in showing mercy if you will bring your burden to him.

God's Promise to You: “It may be your nature to sin, but it is mine to forgive.”

Section 3, Week 20, Day 2

Psalm 51

360 words

God's Identity

Because He Forgives

Psalm 51 Sometimes we have to talk to someone who's "been there." When it comes to our sin, and whether the backdrop of God's forgiveness is really tall and wide enough to encompass what we've done . . . we need to talk to David. It is hard for us to imagine that one with a tender heart like the shepherd-king of Israel could have done what he did. But he did, and so have we in one way or another. Maybe we haven't done exactly what David did, but we have probably *felt* like he did. And because our sin probably hurts the same way his did, he can help us know that the forgiving character of God is adequate for us like it was for him.

David forcibly took for himself the wife of one of his most trusted military officers. He committed adultery with her and then had her husband killed. To make a long story short, David's passions, selfishness, and fear of man overruled his wisdom, integrity, and fidelity to God. Around nine months later, when a son had been born as a result of his illicit affair (2 Samuel 11-12), David confessed his sin to God. Psalm 51 is a record of his confession.

In David's prayer we discover the character of God: he is merciful and compassionate, shows unfailing love, blots out sin, and washes and cleanses us from our guilt (vv. 1-2). He knows our sin before we confess (yet waits for our confession), and is perfectly just when he pronounces us guilty (vv. 3-4). Though we are life-long sinners, he still expects us to be truthful with him (v. 5). When we are, we are cleansed and hear joy and gladness as he hides his face from our sin (vv. 6-8). He gives us a pure heart, restores our spirit, and does not drive us away from himself (vv. 10-12). And, he lets us encourage others to turn to him (v. 13).

Do you see why David went to God, hard as it must have been? It's why we should go to him as well, hard as it might be. It's because he forgives.

God's Promise to You: "As I was with David, so I will be with you."

Section 3, Week 19, Day 3

Psalm 32:1-2

357 words

My Identity

Be Happy, Be Forgiven

Psalm 32:1-2 The British poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson, probably wrote correctly (if unrealistically) when he said, “The happiness of a man in this life does not consist in the absence but in the mastery of his passions.” The complete mastery of one’s passions would undoubtedly lead to continual happiness because there would be no sin, which inevitably removes happiness. On this, Tennyson spoke correctly. But realistically, how helpful is this as a remedy for happiness? How many people do you know (including the one in the mirror) who have mastered their passions?

What is needed is a recipe for happiness that acknowledges the propensity of men and women to sin. The truth is, we don’t always master our passions. When we don’t, we hurt ourselves or others, become the owner of guilt and shame, and lose our joy. There we sit—guilty, ashamed, and unhappy. That’s when we need a definition of happiness that has enough muscle to remove guilt and shame and restore deep-seated joy.

Fortunately, the Bible gives us such a definition as written by one who failed to master his own passions—and, happily, lived to write about it. Many Bible scholars believe that Psalm 32 was written by David in the aftermath of his horrendous, near year-long debacle with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11). Failing to keep his passions in check, he took another man’s wife, then had the man killed. Not a recipe for happiness in the life of king, commoner, or Christian.

In spite of his actions, David was able to write, “Rejoice in the Lord . . . sing, all you who are upright in heart!” (Psalm 32:11). How did he get from horrendous sinner to happy saint? By being forgiven. Psalm 32 is an account of the transformation that takes place when we receive God’s forgiveness. David says that the person is “blessed” (“happy” or “contented” in Hebrew) whose transgressions are forgiven, and who gets that forgiveness by being honest with God.

If you are a person in perfect control of your passions, Psalm 32 isn’t for you. If you’re like David and the rest of us, stay happy by staying forgiven.

God’s Promise to You: “Personal happiness is ultimately found in personal forgiveness.”

Section 3, Week 19, Day 4

Numbers 14:17-23

359 words

Impact

A Powerful Alliance

Numbers 14:17-23 It is said that a young man in the Middle Ages confessed his sin of gossip to a monk. The monk instructed him to place a feather on every doorstep in town, then to go back and retrieve each one. “Why, the wind will have blown them all over town by the time I go back,” objected the lad. “So,” the monk replied, “has your slanderous word become impossible to retrieve as well.”

A murderer can be forgiven, but the dead remain. A gossip can be forgiven, but the wounded remain. A profligate can be forgiven, but his wasted years remain. Of the two hard realities about sin—confession and consequence—both are equally true, though unequally understood. The one that produces joy, relief, and a clear conscience—confession—is more readily embraced than the one that reminds us of sorrow, shame, and the reality of sin—consequences. The truth is that what produces the need for confession—our sin—leaves an easily followed trail of consequences even after we have been forgiven. The price God paid to hear our confession—the death of his Son on the cross—does not automatically pay for erasing the consequences of what we have done.

Israel, a forgiven people, left a trail 40 years long in the sands of Sinai. When God was ready to strike Israel down for their obstinance and lack of faith, Moses pleaded with him to forgive them (Numbers 14:13-16). Greater good would come to God’s name and purposes through his forgiving Israel than through his destroying them. God agreed with Moses, with a caveat: “I have forgiven them, as you asked. Nevertheless” That was a “Nevertheless” that Israel didn’t want to hear. Though God’s forgiveness removed the guilt of their sin, it did not remove the roadblock to their inheriting what their obedience would have secured. However, wandering for forty years was better than wandering for eternity.

Consequences remind us of what confession gains—the forgiveness of sin—while reminding us of what yet remains—the sorrows of sin. Forgiveness and consequences together forge a powerful alliance against the temptation to sin again.

God’s Promise to You: “I allow consequences not to haunt you, but to teach you.”

Section 3, Week 19, Day 5

1 John 1:9

359 words

Implication

Saying What God Says

1 John 1:9 On a hot summer day, you glance out the window just in time to see your six-year old son angrily whack his buddy with the nozzle end of the garden hose. With a bandage applied, you walk the friend home and apologetically explain to his mom what happened. Back at home, you know your son was at fault, but there's something he needs to learn—how to confess.

“Billy, tell me what happened,” you begin. “Sam wouldn't let go of the hose, and it was my turn to squirt the kids,” he offers. “What about the cut on Sam's forehead,” you continue. “The hose hit him,” Billy suggests. It takes a while, but once Billy realizes that you saw everything that happened, he is finally willing to confess: “I got mad and hit Sam with the hose.” Up until that moment, he had not confessed. Instead of a pilgrimage for absolution, he had been on a fishing trip, looking for the lowest common denominator between you and him. Only when his words matched what you saw did confession occur. Once he confessed, he was ready to seek and receive forgiveness—but not before.

Many adult Christians lack the skill of confession mentioned in 1 John 1:9. An easy way to understand confession is to understand two things: First, God sees everything. Second, we have to say the same thing he sees and says. The Greek word for confess mean to “say the same as.” When John says, “If we confess our sins . . .” he means, “If we say the same thing about our sin that God says about it . . .” When we agree with God's assessment of our sin, God is “faithful and just and will forgive us . . . and purify us . . .”

When we ask God to forgive us for something that is different than what he saw and heard (“I was mistaken” instead of “I lied”) we are fishing, not confessing. God knows what he sees and hears, and expects us to confess the same thing. When forgiveness is the result, why would we say anything less?

God's Promise to You: “If we can agree about the presence of sin, we can agree about its removal.”