

THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON YOU CAN EVER LEARN

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339 – 304:1-5 – 749 – 304:6,7

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Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.

When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"—and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.

Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him. Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart! —Psalm 32

We teach our kids a lot of lessons in life—things we want them to learn and remember all through their lives.

- We teach them **how to fish**. We show them how to bait the hook, throw it in the water, and wait for a fish to bite. And when they get a bite, we teach them how to set the hook and reel the fish in. All the while we're doing that, we're also teaching them patience...and persistence—important life-lessons for them to know.
- We teach them **how to read**. We teach them the alphabet and how to sound out letters and words. And then we teach them how to make sense of what they're reading. It's a skill they need to know.
- We teach our kids **how to swim**. We teach them to lie flat, to float, and to kick. It's a skill that could one day save their lives.

All of these are good lessons. We learned them ourselves when we were young, and so we pass them on to our children. But there is one lesson we teach our kids that is far more important than any of them, and that is this: We teach our children to say, "I'm sorry."

That's a key to getting along in life—in our friendships, families, and marriages. In the Bible, it's called **repentance**—**confessing** your sin, **turning away** from it, and **trusting** that it's forgiven. It's an easy concept to understand, but a very hard one to put into practice. It touches on every relationship you have in life—especially your relationship with God. And for that reason alone, *learning to repent* is...

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Today we'll boil it down to three simple steps:

1. **Be completely honest about yourself.**
2. **Be completely humble before God.**
3. **Be completely sure that you are forgiven.**

When it comes to repentance, we're all life-long learners.

Yes, it's an important lesson. It's taught in every book of the Bible, especially the psalms. Psalm 32 is a case in point. It's one of the "seven penitential psalms"—that is to say, it's **all about** repentance. It has a fascinating backstory—almost as if it was taken out of today's news—involving sex, lies, and murder. And in its day, it went **viral**. [**scandal**]

In the spring of the year, when kings went off to war, David chose stay home. One evening, from the roof of his palace, he saw a woman bathing in the evening sunlight... The king was struck by her beauty; he had to have her. So he summoned her to his palace and slept with her. She went back home, but before long, she had a message for the king. "I am pregnant," it said. Now the king has a problem.

King David had a reputation to uphold, so he did everything he could to cover up the affair. He gave Uriah, the woman's husband, a leave from his military service to come home and spend time with his wife...and make it look as if **he** was the father, not **David**. It didn't work. Uriah was too honorable; he refused to relax at home while the other soldiers were out in the fields. So the king tried again—this time making Uriah drunk and sending him home...but that didn't work either. So the king felt he had no choice. He gave the order for Uriah to be put on the front line of battle and for the other soldiers to withdraw so that he would be killed in the line of duty. And this time, it worked. Uriah was killed.

Now, for a time, everything seems fine. The king has a beautiful new wife, and it all has the appearance of being on the up-and-up. But, we're told, the cover-up and murder greatly displeased the Lord. There was nothing honest about it. After what appears to have been an entire year, the Lord sent the prophet Nathan to David to confront him: *"You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites"* (2 Samuel 12:9). The truth was jarring, but it was necessary. Without it, David—the Lord's anointed—was on his way to hell. He needed to learn the lesson of **repentance**.

Do you understand how important this lesson is? It's life-and-death—eternal life versus everlasting damnation! I need to be completely **honest** about myself. I need to admit that, yes, I **can** be wrong, and that I often **am** wrong. *"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us"* (1 John 1:8). There is no good reason for us to put on a front and act as if nothing's wrong deep within our hearts. We're **sinners** and we **sin**; that's what sinners do. And when we sin, we need to be **honest** about it, because denying the painful truth never helps anyone. It only hurts others...and endangers our relationship with God.

If you have an argument at home, search your heart and confess what you can and must. Ask for forgiveness from the one you've hurt, and be honest with yourself. If you find yourself tempted to lust, recognize that. Be honest with yourself. Approach the Lord in prayer, and take steps to stop it. If you have problems controlling the way you consume alcohol, be honest about it. Seek help from others and from the Lord. Don't let your pride keep you from doing what's right.

Do you remember playing **hide and seek** as a child? [**kids hiding behind tree**] I do. I got to be pretty good at it, too...and I think I discovered the best hiding place—**ever**. It was in the pile of clothes in the basement at the bottom of the laundry chute. I can still remember my sister standing right next to me and saying, "Where did Tom go?"

But sometimes playing hide and seek is not so fun...like when we're trying to hide from God—trying to conceal our sins from him. *"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer"* (Psalm 32:3,4). That's the agony of a guilty conscience. In the end David learned that he couldn't hide from God. He said, *"Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'—and you forgave the guilt of my sin"* (Psalm 32:5).

You can't hide from God. [**kid hiding behind tree**] As long as David covered up his sin, he was miserable. But when he stopped lying, when he opened up his heart and dealt honestly with his sin, when he **humbled himself before the Lord** and sought his forgiveness, that's when he found **peace**.

There is a reason we need to humble ourselves before God. He's God. He sees and knows all. But when we confess our sins and humble ourselves before him, he lifts us up from the depths with his Word of forgiveness. He brings joy to our hearts...and that's what moves us to worship him.

David says, *"You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance"* (Psalm 32:7). God is our hiding-place, our refuge. Maybe I can't hide **from** him, but I can always hide **in** him—I can find peace and security in his forgiving love. Sometimes life gets hard and a lot of the time, it's my own fault. But I can come to the Lord...and the guilt that pursues me will never be able to reach me in his powerful and loving arms.

David learned his lesson and in Psalm 32 he passes it on: *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you"* (Psalm 32:8,9). I need to know that sometimes, the biggest problem is **my own stubbornness**. Stubborn pride hurts friendships and fractures marriages. It hardens consciences and confirms addictive behaviors. Why is it so hard to see that? Why is it so hard to say, "I'm sorry?" Confession is good for the soul. There is no sin for which Jesus did not die. I can lay my heart open before God and find peace.

"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit" (Psalm 32:1,2). There is a joy only a forgiven sinner can know. And it comes from **complete honesty**...and **complete humility** before God. *"Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him"* (Psalm 32:10).

That's a lesson worth learning...from a God worth praising. Every day.

AMEN.