

The title of this morning's sermon is "*When I Kept Silent About My Sin.*"ⁱ

Katie and I appreciated last week's vacation. I took my family to Redmond, Oregon, and then returned and took Ricky and Johnny to a men's retreat at Cedar Springs Christian Retreat Center in Sumas, Washington, near the Canadian border. I am grateful to Pastor Nathan for covering for me. I thought his sermon was exceptional, which I hope you'll listen to if you haven't yet.

Now, I'm glad to be back to deliver this second sermon on Psalm 32.

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I want to begin by telling you about one of the most difficult students I had as an elementary school teacher, who also became one of my favorites.

His father was in jail. I still remember reading a letter he wrote him encouraging him to be strong because he knew prison must be really difficult. Imagine a son writing that to a father!

I don't think his mother was in the picture. His aunt, who also had her children to care for, raised him. I don't think she was married, so she had to work full-time to care for herself and the children, which didn't leave much time for him.ⁱⁱ

Even though he behaved poorly, regularly disrupting class and getting in trouble, if I could have, I would have had him in class every year.

So, what gave me so much affection for him besides his difficult background, which made me want to see him succeed? He never argued, made excuses, lied, or blamed others when he got in trouble. He made foolish decisions but admitted what he did wrong whenever I confronted him.

I found this to be very refreshing because the first two words out of most students' mouths when they were in trouble were the word "But" followed by the name of the student they wanted to blame: "But Brian hit me first," or "But Jessica was talking to me when I was trying to work."

The humility to accept responsibility is endearing and impressive. I have often wondered how King David could be the Man after God's Own Heart after committing adultery with Bathsheba and then trying to hide his sin by murdering her husband, Uriah. David's actions were so wicked that we would doubt the salvation of anyone else who did the same. I'm convinced that at least part of the reason God spoke so highly of David was his humility in accepting responsibility for his actions.

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In the last sermon, we started looking at Psalm 32, which David wrote after confessing. The psalm is fascinating because David did two things:

1. In verses one and two, which we looked at last sermon, David wrote about the blessedness that came when he confessed.
2. In verses three through five, which we will look at this morning, David wrote about the misery he experienced when he kept silent about his sin.

Look with me at verse 3 to pick up from where we left off:

Psalm 32:3 For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah

When David said, "When I kept silent," he criticized himself. He meant:

- "When I wouldn't confess my sin."
- "When I pretended to be deaf to the Holy Spirit's conviction."
- "When I was stubborn, proud, and rebellious."

Now, if Cain, Absalom, or Ahab wrote these words, we wouldn't wonder what they were thinking because we expect men like them to keep silent about their sin. But David wrote these words and he was the Man after God's Own Heart. So, we can wonder what a deeply spiritual and godly man could have been thinking when he kept silent about his sin.

I have wondered this many times. Some of you might remember that the first books I chose to preach through when I came to WCC were 1 and 2 Samuel. I don't think it would be too much to say that second only to Jesus, I have spent more time thinking about and studying David than anyone else in Scripture.

I have come to believe that David likely hoped the conviction and shame would go away with time. If that wasn't the case, then why wouldn't he confess?

But conviction is a painful feeling that doesn't disappear, at least for believers:

- Romans 1 describes reprobates who have been given over to their sin, and their conviction goes away.
- Ephesians 4:19 describes people "who, BEING PAST FEELING, have given themselves over to sin." Their conviction has gone away.
- 1 Timothy 4:2 describes "liars whose CONSCIENCES ARE SEARED." Their conviction has also gone away.

But these are unbelievers. For believers, conviction doesn't disappear. The struggle gets worse with each passing day.

Sometimes, getting caught can be a relief. We want our sin brought to light, so we are forced to deal with it. We don't want to be able to hide any longer or keep living a double life because it is exhausting and painful.

Second Samuel 11 records David's murder and adultery. We wouldn't know it from that chapter, but David was paying an excruciating price when he kept silent.

One of the marks of the integrity of Scripture is it records the lowest points of some of its greatest people. No punches are pulled.

David experienced many painful seasons in his life:

- I think about when he had to spend over ten years fleeing from Saul, who was trying to take his life. He had to leave his family and friends behind and live in caves. During this time, Saul also took his daughter, Michal, David's wife, from David and gave her to another man.
- I think about when David's son, Absalom, took the throne from him. Making it worse, much of the nation that David loved and served, joined Absalom, including the elders of the land and David's close friend, Ahithophel.
- I think about the end of David's life when his son, Adonijah, took the throne from him, and some of the men who had been loyal to David for decades, such as his nephew and general, Joab, and Abiathar, the priest, joined Adonijah.

We don't know which of these seasons was the worst for David because he didn't rank them from least to most excruciating. For greater insight, we can look at David's psalms describing many of these seasons. I think we would be hard-pressed to find another psalm describing David feeling as bad as he did in Psalm 32 when he kept silent about his sin.

And this brings us to lesson one:

Lesson One: Sin is a heavy burden.

John Donne said, "*Sin is a serpent, and whoever covers it only keeps it warm so it may sting even more fiercely, and disperse the venom more effectively.*"

I think John Bunyan understood this well because he tried to capture it in his famous book. *Pilgrim's Progress* is a Christian allegory. An allegory is a literary device that uses the names of people, places, or events to represent whatever they are named after.

For example, in *Pilgrim's Progress*:

- The protagonist, or main character, Christian, represents Christians during our earthly journeys.
- Evangelist sets Christian on his journey by preaching the gospel to him.
- Pliable is insecure and travels only briefly before giving up.
- Obstinate is stubborn and thinks the journey is foolish.

One of the strongest, most recurring images throughout the book is the burden Christian carries, which represents sin. Christian spends the book trying to get rid of this burden. He says, "That which I seek for [is] to be rid of this heavy burden; but get it off my self I cannot: nor is there a man in our Country that can take it off my shoulders; therefore am I going this way, as I told you, that I may be rid of my burden."ⁱⁱⁱ

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We sing about sin being a heavy burden.

Consider the lyrics of this well-known hymn:

What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!

Joseph M. Scriven is the author of this hymn, and he praised Jesus for bearing our sins for us because they are such a burden.

Are we weak and heavy-laden, cumbered with a load of care?

More language of a heavy burden.

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We tend to think of certain sins having physical consequences, such as addictions to drugs or alcohol. We might recognize that sinful anger affects us physically because of the increased blood pressure and wear and tear on our hearts.

But we probably don't think of adultery and murder having physical consequences when they're unconfessed. But David described the physical consequences.

And this brings us to lesson two...

Lesson Two: If we keep silent about sin, it can (Part One) physically affect us.

Look at each phrase in verse 2:

- "My bones wasted away," which means David could feel it deeply.
- "Through my groaning all day long," which means David's pain never went away.
- "Day and night your hand was heavy upon me," which means David couldn't sleep. Nighttime wasn't any better than daytime.
- "My strength was dried up as by the heat of summer," which means David knew it was aging him. His vitality was leaving him. He could feel his sin slowly killing him.

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Listen to this:

1 Kings 1:1 King David was old and advanced in years. And although they covered him with clothes, he could not get warm.

David sounds like a sick, decrepit old man. His body was failing him.

This would be expected if David were as old as the godly men in the Old Testament when they died. So, what age did godly men die in the Old Testament?

Here are a few examples:

- Abraham died at 175.
- Isaac died at 180.
- Jacob died at 147.
- Moses died at 120.
- Joshua died at 110.

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Guess how old David was when he died?

Only 70!

David was probably about 50 old when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered Uriah. Up to that point, he was one of the most vibrant and vigorous men in Scripture. But after his sin, his health quickly deteriorated at a young age.

Why?

I think part of it is that when David kept silent about his sin, it took not just a spiritual, mental, and emotional toll on him, but a physical one as well.

There's generally a quality of life that we're afforded when we obey God. I say generally because there are godly, obedient people who still experience poor health.

Conversely, there's a wear and tear we experience when we disobey God, and it's made even worse when we keep silent about our sin.

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Let me show you two more examples. Look one chapter to the left at **Psalms 31:10...**

Psalms 31:10a For my life is spent with sorrow,

David had no joy.

Psalms 31:10b and my years with sighing;

He's filled with grief.

Psalms 31:10c my strength fails because of my iniquity,

Again, losing vitality.

Psalms 31:10d and my bones waste away.

Again, physical suffering.

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Turn to the right to Psalm 38:2:

Psalm 38:2 For your arrows have sunk into me, and your hand has come down on me. 3 There is NO SOUNDNESS IN MY FLESH because of your indignation; there is NO HEALTH IN MY BONES because of my sin.

Another vivid description of the physical toll taken on David because of sin.

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And I want you to notice something else in these verses. David says:

- YOUR arrows have sunk into me.
- YOUR hand has come down on me.
- There is no soundness in my flesh because of YOUR indignation.

David was suffering, and he knew that suffering came from God!

And this brings us to the next part of lesson two:

Lesson Two: If we keep silent about sin, it can (Part Two) bring God's discipline.

Spurgeon said, "God does not permit his children to sin successfully."

Turn back to Psalm 32:4 to reread it:

Psalm 32:4 For day and night YOUR HAND WAS HEAVY UPON ME; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

David knew God was disciplining him.

He said the same thing elsewhere.

Psalm 39:10 Remove YOUR STROKE FROM ME; I am spent by the hostility of YOUR HAND.

David knew it wasn't just conscience or shame weighing on him. He knew God was pressing down on him, and he pleaded with God to stop.

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I have said before that we tend to wrongly associate forgiveness with the absence of consequences. In other words, we can sin, confess, and assume because we are forgiven that there will be no consequences. But there can still be consequences even though we're forgiven.

But if we sin and refuse to confess, which is to say, we keep silent, then we are almost guaranteed to suffer because God will discipline us until we confess.

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We almost use the words discipline and punishment synonymously. For example, we might say, "God is disciplining me for my sin," or "God is punishing me for my sin," and think we are saying the same thing.

But this is completely unbiblical. Jesus took the punishment for our sins when he hung on the cross. There is no more punishment for our sins if we are Christians.

But there is discipline if we are God's children:

Hebrews 12:6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” 7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

So, when God disciplines us, it isn't a judge punishing a criminal for his crimes. Instead, it is a loving father dealing with his children to get us to repent.

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God disciplined David until he finally – and wonderfully – broke:

Psalm 32:5 I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,” and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

The words “iniquity of my sin” sound odd because we normally say “iniquity” or “sin,” but David said “iniquity of my sin” to focus on the wickedness of what he did. It's like saying the evil of my sin.

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Make sure you notice something important: the misery of verses 3 and 4 helped produce the confession of verse 5. David's misery was a gift from God because it brought him to repentance.

Finally, he humbled himself and confessed. He stopped keeping silent. He was finally unburdened of his burden. The debt was canceled. The twisted was made straight.

What might have been the longest year of his life was finally over. All the shame and conviction were gone. There was no more hiding. He stopped lying to himself and others. Most importantly, he stopped lying to God.

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And notice two things about his confession.

First, it is tied to verse 1. In verse 1, he mentioned sin, iniquity, and transgression, and now he mentions all three again:

1. I acknowledged my sin to you.
2. I did not cover my iniquity.
3. I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.

It's like David knew all he did and wanted to ensure he confessed everything.

Second, there's an emphasis on WHO he confessed to:

- “I acknowledged my sin to YOU.”
- “I will confess my transgression to THE LORD.”

David sinned against many people, but ultimately, he knew his sin was against God. As he wrote in his other Psalm of repentance:

Psalm 51:5 Against YOU, YOU only, have I sinned, and done this evil in YOUR sight.

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Interestingly, after David confessed, he experienced not just a spiritual recovery but a physical one:

Psalm 51:8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let THE BONES THAT YOU HAVE BROKEN REJOICE.

David knew the toll his silence took on him, so he expected to heal physically when he confessed.

I'm not saying we should all expect the same, but I would say that because keeping silent takes a physical toll, when we confess, that burden can be lifted, and we improve physically.

Lesson Three: A confession can (Part One) bring relief.

Just as much as the misery of verses 3 and 4 produced the confession of verse 5, we could also say the confession of verse 5 ended the misery of verses 3 and 4.

When we're in verses 3 and 4, we feel:

- The burden of sin.
- The shame and conviction
- The toll on us spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically.
- The separation from God.

We might even have the same questions David had:

- *“Do the people around me know what I've done?”*
- *“How long can I keep hiding this?”*
- *“When will my husband or wife, parents, children, friends, or church find out?”*
- *“What is God thinking? Is he going to discipline me?”*

These questions weigh on us. They are part of the reason sin is such a burden until it is confessed.

But when we confess, there is great relief.

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Do me a favor...

Look at that small space between verses 4 and 5. I don't have the words to describe its importance. That space represents the choice we must make when we sin:

Will we remain in the misery of verses 3 and 4 or will move to the confession and relief of verse 5?

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Listen to this wonderful verse:

Proverbs 28:13 Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

When we conceal our transgressions, we ensure we will not prosper. We are setting ourselves up for failure. That is sobering!

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Consider how well this verse captures the verses we have studied in Psalm 32:

Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper,

This is what David experienced in verses 3 and 4: bones wasting away, groaning all day long, day and night, God's hand being heavy upon him, his strength drying up.

but he who confesses and forsakes them

This is what David did in verse 5: acknowledging sin to God, not covering iniquity, and confessing transgression to the Lord.

will obtain mercy.

This is the blessedness David described in verses 1 and 2: the blessing of having transgression forgiven, having God cover the sin, God not counting the iniquity against us, and not having to live in deceit.

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I once quoted this verse to someone and told him he would not prosper if he kept concealing his sin, a sin that kept coming up in his life.

I did not tell him I didn't think he would prosper if he didn't confess because I am a prophet and know the future. I told him I didn't think he would prosper if he didn't confess because that's what God's Word says.

I also told him that he would obtain mercy if he confessed and forsook his sin. I didn't mean just mercy from God, although that's true. I also meant mercy from the people who caught him sinning. As far as I know, he never confessed, and I believe he failed to prosper.

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Now, we have spoken so much about David's confession, don't you want to know what it sounded like so we can learn from it?

Nathan the prophet confronted David, and then we read:

2 Samuel 12:13a David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord."

That's it. It is surprisingly brief, isn't it?^{iv}

And this brings us to Lesson Four:

Lesson Three: A confession can (Part Two) be short.

Keil and Delitzsch said, "*The words are very few, but that is a good sign of a thoroughly broken spirit. There is no excuse, no hiding, no concealment of the sin. There is no searching for a loophole, no pretext put forward, no human weakness pleaded. He acknowledged his guilt openly, candidly and without any denial of truth.*"

The confession is only two words in Hebrew, and one of the words is the word for God. So, the confession itself was only one word!

Because the confession is short, we can learn more from what he did NOT say than what he did say. So, let's consider what David didn't say.

First, he didn't say anything rationalizing his sin, such as, "I didn't mean to see Bathsheba bathing," or, "Lots of kings had many wives, so I was just doing what was normal," or "I had to send men to battle against the Ammonites. It's not my fault Uriah died any more than it's my fault other soldiers died."

Second, he didn't shift blame. There's only one pronoun David used, and it is "I." There's no, "we, they, them, us, he or she."

You might be quick to say, "Well, it is no big deal that he didn't blame anyone, because there was nobody else TO blame."

Our flesh always tempts us to find someone to blame, and it was no different for David.

He could have blamed Bathsheba for bathing where she could be seen.

He could have blamed Adam for his flesh: "I'm a weak man, and if Adam hadn't sinned and given me this nature, I wouldn't have done this."

He could have blamed God for the way God made him. An older man told me once, “If God didn’t want me to commit sexual sin, then why did he give me such strong desires?”

This is probably why we read:

James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

James knew we would be tempted to blame the God who created us, so he told us not to do that when we are tempted.

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One of the most common things we blame is our upbringing:

- “If only my family had taken better care of me.”
- “If my parents hadn’t gotten divorced.”
- “If my siblings had been nicer to me.”

David could have said something like this because it seems like he had a difficult upbringing.

When Samuel the prophet came to anoint the next king of Israel, David’s family didn’t even think to invite him. They left him out in the field to watch the sheep.

When David heard about Goliath taunting the Israelites, and David went to the frontlines to bring supplies and learn what was happening, we read:

1 Samuel 17:28 Eliab his eldest brother heard [David] and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, “Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption and the evil of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle.”

Eliab seems like a poor older brother. We might have expected him to be happy to see David, and then thank him for bringing supplies. But instead, he was belittling and accusing. Being a shepherd is a humble occupation, and Eliab made sure to make David feel even worse by pointing out he only had “a few sheep.”

David’s response shows he was used to being mistreated:

1 Samuel 17:29a And David said, “What have I done now?”

Growing up for David was tough. But he didn’t use that as an excuse for his sin.

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Finally, David could have blamed Saul for trying to murder him for years. This is one of the most common ways we excuse our sins:

- The young man who shoots up a school blames the kids who picked on him.
- The man who gets drunk blames his boss for stressing him out.
- The woman who yells blames her kids for not behaving better.

But David didn’t shift blame. Instead, he made a pure, sincere confession.

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And we can learn one more important thing from David’s confession:

Sincere confessions can bring habitual sins to an end.

If you read the chapters leading up to David’s adultery, you see him multiplying wives. He satisfied his flesh for far too long. It finally culminated in his sin with Bathsheba.

But David’s confession ended this sin. After this, he wasn’t a perfect man, but there were no more struggles in this area.

Let me conclude this sermon by telling you how Nathan responded to David’s confession:

2 Samuel 12:13 David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” And Nathan said to David, “The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die.

David didn’t have to do penance, produce fruit, or work hard to be forgiven. He had to sincerely confess, and Nathan told him that God “Put away [his] sin.”

We exchange our burden for Jesus’ perfection. It is double imputation. We give Jesus our sin, and he gives us his righteousness.

Christian was carrying the heavy burden that symbolized his sin. This burden is what set him off on his journey. It wasn’t until he reached the place of Deliverance, or the Cross, that he could get rid of the burden. John Bunyan wrote:

“[Christian] ran thus till he came to a place somewhat ascending; and upon that place stood a cross...So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back; and began to tumble, and so continued to do so until...I saw it no more.”^v

The only way in which Christian could get rid of his burden was through the cross of Christ. Similarly, the only way we can get rid of our burdens is by looking to the cross of Christ.

Normally I offer to meet with you up front after service, if you have any questions or I can pray for you, but I’ve been sick this past week, so please see Pastor Nathan or one of the other elders.

Let’s pray.

ⁱ DONE:

- Nelson
- Moody
- JM
- Wiersbe

ⁱⁱ When I was a schoolteacher, I wondered if I had a higher percentage of misbehaving students than other teachers. I tried to tell myself that all teachers sometimes feel this way, and I probably had the same percentage as everyone else. But then two things happened.

First, I was in the staff room one day with a group of teachers, and we shared the names of the difficult students we had in our classes. When I gave my students' names, different teachers commented that they couldn’t believe one teacher had been given so many difficult students.

Then, my suspicion was confirmed when my assistant principal told me this was the case! I was leaving the school, and I asked for a letter of recommendation. I dug up the letter this past week to ensure I remembered correctly. He wrote about the – and I quote – “behavior problems” they had been putting in my classroom. I did not imagine I had more difficult students than other teachers!

ⁱⁱⁱ Pilgrim's Progress, page 18.

^{iv} Last week I spoke at a men's retreat and in one of my messages I contrasted Saul and David. One of the things that stood out to me is Saul used WAY more words than David, but never repented.

When Saul offered the sacrifice that Samuel was supposed to offer:

1 Samuel 13:11 Samuel said, "What have you done?" And Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, 12 I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the Lord.' So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering."

When Saul didn't destroy all of the Amalekites and their stuff:

1 Samuel 14:14 And Samuel said, "What...is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?" 15 Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the Lord your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction."

He used the word "sin." This word is lost in our world where nothing's wrong and everything's relative, but David didn't say he made a mistake, or gaffe, or blunder: he said he sinned.

^v Pilgrim's Progress page 37.