

**Psalm 32:1-11 O.T. 179 (NRSV)**

<sup>1</sup>Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. <sup>2</sup>Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

<sup>3</sup>While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. <sup>4</sup>For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selah*

<sup>5</sup>Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” and you forgave the guilt of my sin. *Selah*

<sup>6</sup>Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them. <sup>7</sup> You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. *Selah*

<sup>8</sup>I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. <sup>9</sup>Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you.

<sup>10</sup>Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD. <sup>11</sup>Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

**Psalm 32:1-11 O.T. Page 179**  
**“The Favor of Forgiveness”**

**Opening Prayer:** Please bow with me in prayer. O Lord God, speak your life changing Word into our hearts and minds today. In Jesus Name we pray, **Amen.**

**Introduction: Regrets**, we all have them. Regrets are things we’ve done in life we wish we could take back. Wrongs we’ve committed, hurts we’ve inflicted, daggers we’ve plunged into other people’s souls. Few men have been more haunted by their regrets than has **John Newton**. Newton was a ship captain who **transported thousands of Africans** to the New World where American’s bought them as slaves. **One day**, while Newton was steering his ship through a violent storm, fearing all would be lost, Newton, cried out “**Lord, have mercy upon us.**” At that moment God’s grace begun to work on the crusty sea captain’s soul. Later Newton would count that as the day of his conversion. **Eventually Newton** gave up the slave trade and went on to become an Anglican priest. Very late in life, while serving a parish in London, Newton befriended **William Wilberforce**, a politician and abolitionist who was leading the struggle to abolish the slave trade in England. **A 2006 movie** tells the story of the relationship between Newton and Wilberforce. Newton, now an old man and nearly blind, helps Wilberforce by compiling a list of the names of British ship owners engaged in the slave trade. Here’s a scene from the movie as Newton gives the list to Wilberforce and the regrets from Newton’s past well up from the depths of his soul.

{**Play Video: “Amazing Grace.wmv” [1.05]**}

John Newton had regrets, 20,000 of them, **but John Newton experienced God’s amazing grace**, a grace that saved even a wretch like him. And yes, it was John Newton who wrote the all-time favorite hymn, “**Amazing Grace.**” God’s grace is amazing; God’s grace can overcome the torment of our regrets.

**PAUSE**

**Move I.**

**What's so amazing about God's grace is God's forgiveness.** Our sins against God and against our fellow humans can be so very great. What we deserve is God's punishment, but what God offers us is God's forgiveness. By grace, God can take someone as sinful as a slave ship captain and turn him into the writer of a hymn that speaks to the inner recesses of people's souls. **Surely if God's grace is sufficient for a man like John Newton, God's grace is sufficient for us all.**

**Our Bible lesson today** is one of seven penitential Psalms. Now there's a word you don't hear very often, "**penitential.**" **To be penitential is to be sorry for a wrong you've committed.** To be penitential is to be full of regret. You can see the wrong you've done, but you know you're powerless to make that wrong right. **John Newton was penitential.** John Newton was full of regrets. John Newton couldn't free the thousands of Africans he'd carted off to slavery in the New World. And even worse, John Newton couldn't bring back from the dead the thousands more of those Africans who'd died in his ship's hold and whose bodies Newton ordered tossed overboard into the sea. **Those were** John Newton's 20,000 ghosts. John Newton was a wretch that deserved God's punishment.

**Psalm 32** is about a man who is likewise a wretch who deserves God's punishment. That man is no one less than King David. **And the wrong** that David committed was to covet another man's wife. David broke the tenth of the great commandants that God had given to Moses up on Mount Sinai. **In Exodus 20:17 (NRSV)** God commands, "**You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.**" But that's exactly what David did. You all know the story. David sees Bathsheba bathing on her rooftop and decides he wants her to be his wife. But there's a problem. Bathsheba's already married to one of the soldiers in David's army. So David orders the unit that Bathsheba's husband is serving into the front lines of the battle where he's killed. Then David takes Bathsheba as his own.

In breaking the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment, **David also breaks the sixth**, he murders Bathsheba's husband. **When the prophet Nathan** confronts David with his sin, David knows he deserves to die for what he's done. But that's when God does something amazing; God forgives David. Psalm 32 is David's response to the overwhelming relief of God's amazing grace. **In Psalm 32:1-2a (NRSV)** the psalmist opens, "**Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity.**" God does David a favor. **That's what grace is, God's unmerited favor.** When we deserve death, God gives us life. God grants us "*The Favor of Forgiveness.*" **Yes, what's so amazing about God's grace is God's forgiveness.**

**End I.**

**Move II.**

**But there are two sides to forgiveness.** There's the side of the offender and there's the side of the offended. There's the side of the sinner and there's the side of the sinned-against. **There's the perpetrator** and the victim. When we think about sin and forgiveness, we tend to focus primarily on the side of the perpetrator. But there's another side to sin. It's the side of the sinned against. **This is a book** I read while I was in seminary: "*The Other Side of Sin, Woundedness from the Perspective of the Sinned-Against.*" **Andrew Sung Park and Susan Nelson** edited the book. **Susan Nelson** was one of my theology professors at seminary whom I've mentioned before. We couldn't have been more different, she was a feminist liberal, and I was a male conservative. And yet, she was one of my best teachers. It was Dr. Nelson who helped me see sin from its other side. As a pastor, I've found that it's important to be able to see sins from both sides. In any given situation there are always **sinner and the sinned against**. And just as there are these two sides to sin, the sinner and the sinned against, there are also two sides to forgiveness, **the forgiven** and **the forgiver**. Forgiveness requires both sides.

**One of the questions** that the *United Methodist Book of Discipline* asks candidates for ordinations is, "**What effect has the practice of ministry had on your understanding of humanity and the need for divine grace?**" Long before I went into full-time ministry, I understood that human nature is broken. We human beings are capable of doing horrible things to one another. But there's an aspect of brokenness that the practice of ministry has exposed that I hadn't thought about before. Not only does brokenness leads us to do horrible things to each other, **brokenness also prevents us from offering forgiveness to each other**. As people, we're never as willing to forgive as God is. We like holding grudges and we want people to have to pay for their sins. Especially if we're the one they've sinned against. To forgive is contrary to our most basic of instincts.

It was the eighteenth-century English poet, Alexander Pope, who first said, *“To err is human; to forgive is divine.”* Forgiveness maybe contrary to human nature, but it is fundamental to God’s nature. Only when the **spark of the divine** comes alive within our soul can we ever forgive someone who’s sinned against us. **To forgive** a spouse of infidelity requires a divine spark within. **To forgive** a person who’s lied to you requires a divine spark within. **To forgive** someone who’s abused you physically or mentally requires a divine spark within. Just as we need God’s grace to be forgiven, we need God’s grace to be able to forgive.

**When it comes to forgiveness**, I sometimes think we let ourselves get caught up in a chicken and egg argument. **Which comes first, repentance or forgiveness?** Most of us believe that **if someone sincerely asks for our forgiveness**, we should forgive them. We believe that that’s the Christian thing to do. We forgive those who show remorse and are sorry for what they’ve done. While that’s all well and good, but divine forgiveness is much broader than that. **Romans 5:8 (NRSV)** says, **“But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.”** God’s offer of forgiveness is already on the table before we’ve even realized we’ve sinned and thought to ask for forgiveness. **The lesson here** is that while repentance is seeking forgiveness, **forgiveness isn’t seeking repentance**. Forgiveness flows out of mercy, out of love. Forgiveness isn’t a reward for contrition. **There’s a quote** from my favorite theologian, nineteenth century Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, that says this perfectly. *“The only true forgiveness is that which is offered and extended before the offended has apologized and sought it.”* That’s the kind of forgiveness God offers us. **And just as God forgives us, we’re to forgive one another** (Colossians 3:13). Yes, we’re used to seeing forgiveness from the side of the forgiven. **But there really are two sides to forgiveness.**

**End II.**

**Move III.**

**So, reach out and give the favor of forgiveness today.** As God has forgiven you for sinning against him, you need to forgive others of sinning against you. God has done a favor for you, and you need to do that same favor for the other people in your life. To truly be forgiven, you must become a forgiver.

**The best know prayer** is the prayer Jesus taught his disciples to pray, we call the *Lord's Prayer*. There's one clause in that prayer that's a "conditional clause." It's the clause that deals with forgiveness. Let's see, how does it go? **"And forgive us our trespasses, and we forgive those who trespass against us."** Jesus is teaching us to pray asking God to forgive us, as we forgive others. Think about that for a moment. **If you're one to hold a grudge**, if you're one who wants to see people who've wronged you get theirs, what does that say about what you're asking from God when you pray the *Lord's Prayer*? Do you want God to hold your trespasses against you? Or like the Psalmist do you want God not to count them against you? **If you're serious** about wanting God to forgive you, then you better start being serious about forgiving others.

**In our Bible lesson today**, the psalmist talks about what it's like if you don't repent and receive God's offer of forgiveness. **In Psalm 32:3 (NRSV)** the psalmist writes, **"While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long."** It's painful to be a sinner and to be under the conviction of sin, and yet refuse to open your mouth and say, *"I'm sorry."* **Well, in the same way it's equally painful** when someone has wronged you, and then you just sit there and let the hurt fester inside. **Holding back on either side of forgiveness causes your spirit to waste away inside you.** That's what practicing ministry for 18-years has taught me, it's just as difficult for people sinned-against to offer forgiveness as it is for the perpetrators of sin to offer an apology. Any time we live within our human brokenness, our spirit wastes away within us.

**I wonder if any of remember** seeing this picture in the news several years ago. (Raise hand.) This is a woman from near Steubenville, Ohio who received the **first-ever face transplant** at the Cleveland Clinic. **Her name's** Connie Culp, and her story's truly a miracle. Five years before her transplant, Connie's husband, Thomas, shot her in the face and then turn the shotgun on himself. This would have been a classic murder/suicide except for one thing—they both lived. Finally after 30 surgeries, including the 22-hours procedure to replace 80% of her face, Connie could see, and smell, and even keep food in her mouth again. As for her husband Thomas, at the time of her face transplant, he was serving seven years in Ohio state prison for his crime. It took a few more surgeries to tighten the skin on her face, **but Connie reached the point** where she could walk down the street without people staring. Her face transplant was truly a medical marvel.

But back when this story first broke, what struck me as being even more miraculous, was something Connie said in an interview with Diana Sawyer on *Good Morning America*. After talking about what had happened and the horrors of domestic violence, Sawyer ask Connie, “*Do you forgive him?*” Now we would think that Connie would be justified if she wished her husband would be skinned alive or burned at the stake. But instead, Connie answered, “*I forgave him the day he did it.*” Wow! Of course, her husband still had to face the legal consequences of his actions, but the offer of forgiveness was already sitting on the table waiting for him to repent and pick it up. That's why Connie hadn't been wasting away for five years without a face. So, the greatest marvel of Connie's story isn't physical, it's spiritual.

**Yes, God wants** his forgiven to become forgivers. Do those who've wrong you a favor, forgive them! Act upon the spark on the divine that's glowing within your soul. **So, reach out and give the favor of forgiveness today.**

**End III.**



**Conclusion:** God forgave John Newtown, a slave ship captain, and Newton went on to write the greatest hymn of all time, “*Amazing Grace*.” **Yes, what’s so amazing about God’s grace is God’s forgiveness.** King David broke two of God’s commandments and was worthy of death. But God did David a favor and forgave him. **But there are two sides to forgiveness.** There’s the side of the sinner and the side of the sinned-against. There’s the side of the forgivened and the side of the forgiverer. **So, reach out and give the favor of forgiveness today.** Forgive others as God has forgiven you. Don’t let your spirit waste away within you; be a forgiven forgiver and offer others **The Favor of your Forgiveness.**

**Closing Prayer:** Let’s pray. O God, you are our hiding place. In our distress, we come to you. O Lord God, we are forgiven, make us forgivers too. **Amen!**

**10:30: Closing Hymn: “*Grace Greater than Our Sins*” Red Hymnal No. 365**  
All Four Verses

**Sending Forth:** Don’t let your spirit waste away inside you. Repent of your sins and forgive those who have sinned against you. Go forth with joy in your hearts as forgiven forgivers. **And all of God’s people said...Amen!**