

## Defining Moment: Release from Guilt & Shame by Pastor Jenn

Scripture: Psalm 32 & Luke 15: 11b-24

The other week I was sitting in a doctor's office when 2 young parents came in with their young children, and they were so cute, yet so active. And when one child decided to run around, the other did too. Boy did that bring back memories. Because those 2 children we saw were probably only a year apart in age, like our 2 youngest, and when you have them that close together, they feed off of each other. So one parent had one child, the other parent had the other, and they were trying everything to get them to sit still. They tried giving them food, something to drink, reading a book, singing to them, etc. At one point the father had to step out because you could tell he was getting overwhelmed, and I couldn't blame him. The father took a time out.

For those of you unfamiliar with this concept, typically a time out is used when a child is acting out. You take the child and have them sit down, and they are to remain in that seat until they calm down. Scott and I took a parenting course on this when our children were young and the teacher helped us realize that time outs are so important for two reasons. One is the safety of the child. Usually when a child is acting out and needs a time out it is because they are getting out of control and could end up hurt or hurting someone else. But the other important reason for a time out is it allows us the parents to get a time out too, we stop with them and slow down our breathing, lower our blood pressures, and after some time of calmness, we look them in the eye and reassure them that we take those time outs because we love them and want to protect them.

When that father came back in the waiting room the other day, he picked his kids up and held them, hugged them, loved them.

In our lesson from Psalm 32, we are invited to take some time outs as the psalmist speaks of God and forgiveness. And we know he invites us to those time outs because throughout the text we read the word *Selah*, which means pause, and think about what was just said.

Now this psalm is an expression of the author's yearning for a relationship with God. We see that in the first few verses. <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. I imagine the Psalmist is sitting in town and watching people going in and out of temple, and as they do he sees their relief and happiness in being forgiven of their sins.

Now recall with me, if you will that a sin is defined as separating one's self from God and God's will. In this text you also hear the word transgressions which means willful rebellion (v 1) And the world iniquity which means disobedience (v 2) There are other words for sin but these represent Israel's basic vocabulary of what constitutes a sin. What drives us away from God and God's will. But the psalmist knows that sin is the core of our difficulties, our struggles. In fact he believes that The results of sin, transgressions, and iniquities can cause great pain our lives.

In this text, all three are causing the psalmist's bones to waste away through groaning. <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*

Did you catch *that time out*? The psalmist stops to think and reflect on his sin and on God. And as he takes this time out, he realizes God's offering of forgiveness is for all. The psalmist knows the problem is not God, because he knows that God is willing to forgive, rather, the problem is the psalmist's rejection of God, rejection of God's grace. Further the psalmist knows that once we acknowledge our sin, our situations change, verse 5:<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*

Here's another time out. God forgives, therefore he is happy now. In fact after this, sin is no longer mentioned in this psalm and the psalmist now addresses others, as a witness, to God's ability to set things and persons right. <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. <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.

The psalmist begins jealous of those who have a good relationship with God, because they feel God is distant to them, they can't feel or see God, beyond their mistakes. But when the psalmist pauses, he recognizes that God is never distant from us, rather the truth be told we have distanced ourselves from God in our sins. Yet in our *selah*, our time outs, we can remember the happiness, the joy of being loved by God, whose grace will cover all our mistakes.

We hear that in our gospel lesson too. Jesus tells the story of a man who had two sons, and one day the youngest son comes to the father and demands his inheritance, right then and there. The father gave the son what he wanted, and then the son left town. He took a time out, a time away. And do you remember what he does with his inheritance? He blows it. So much that he has nothing to eat and remembers that even the farm hands on his father's farm would receive three meals a day. So he says to himself in Luke 15, verse 17, I'm going back to my father. I'll say to him, Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son. Take me on as a hired hand.' He got right up and went home to his father.

20-21 "When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him. The son started his speech: 'Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son ever again.' 22-24 "But the father wasn't listening. He was calling to the servants, 'Quick. Bring a clean set of clothes and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then get a grain-fed heifer and roast it. We're going to feast! We're going to have a wonderful time! My son is here— given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!' And they began to have a wonderful time.

Jesus summarizes this story by saying what a celebration it is when the lost are found.

Friends, the truth be told that we can find happiness when we start facing up to our own errors and stop doing what separates us from God. Because God has never left us, neither has God's steadfast love, especially in our times of sin and wavering. And sometimes it takes a time out to realize that, appreciate it, and come back to it. That *selah* if you will that brings us happiness with the Lord.

Prayer

God of steadfast love and mercy, remind us once again that in Jesus Christ you invite us to bridge the gap between ourselves and your will. And in Jesus, you offer a forgiveness that can release us from any guilt and shame. Lord, may these defining moments of your gospel renew our faith and trust in you. We ask this in your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.