

Psalm 32:8-11

8 I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. 9 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. 10 Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord. 11 Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart (NRSV).

Psalm 32 starts with a two-fold beatitude followed by a description of illness and a confession. But Psalm 32 can be considered an artistic song of joy because after the confession is a song of thanksgiving for being forgiven by God. It is a celebration of God's grace and the joy of receiving God's forgiveness. Then the psalm calls for the righteous to rejoice in God.

I invite you to go back in time with me on a journey of discovery as I grew up as a child. As a very young small child I begin to wonder about such things as "Who am I? How did I get here? Where are we? What is the universe?" I was frustrated that none of the other children had such wonderment and could not answer my questions and none of the adults could explain in a way that I could understand. I wanted to know God. I wanted to know who is God, where is God, what does God do exactly. So, I spend a lot of time reflecting. As a child growing up I spent a lot of time reflecting on God. I have been reflecting on God and religion with amazing wonder ever since I was a small child while world around me seemed to take it all for granted. I spent a lot of time alone, amazed, looking at the mountains, the sky, and the stars at night.

The psalmist is in a unique position. He is a sincere individual that has reflected on God while the world around him is complacent. Then he comes to a revelation, a degree of understanding, where upon he realizes that he is blessed because his sins are forgiven. This makes him very happy. Since he is exempted from punishment, he is relieved and full of gratitude. So, the psalm points out the nature and benefits of confession because God's character is gracious, loving, and forgiving. The psalmist then gives instruction for any generation at any time, or place, in history, the present, or into the future. Confess your sins, trust in God, and rejoice. The psalmist realizes that his happiness is positively correlated to forgiveness and righteousness is a matter of being open to God's instruction and trusting in God who is fully willing to forgive. This revelation causes him to change because the power of grace has worked within him. His life has changed and he now has a new attitude.

The contemporary lesson for us is how the psalm impacts our lives when we reflect on God and realize that we are blessed and that our sins are forgiven. The title of the sermon is *When a Door Closes* but the psalm is mostly a lesson on rejoicing in God. I chose *When a Door Closes* as the title because a closing door is a metaphor for when something doesn't go your way. When you are down and out, as many are due to the safety restrictions of the pandemic, take a look at your blessings from God. Focus on all of the wonderful things that God has created and the wonderful things that God has done for you. Replace those negative thoughts with positive thoughts and energy. My advice is to do this anytime a door closes in your life; anytime you are down and out. We all get there in life because life is full of worries; setbacks and frustrations, your own personal health, or the health of loved on, and mourning the passing of someone very close to you. Anytime you are bummed out, you can reflect on the most amazing gift ever given to you, God's gift of God's love, grace, and forgiveness.

Your identity is a child of God. This makes you sibling with Christ. Your home is heaven. Your perspective, reality, and worldview are of a heavenly realm. So, the very essence of your being is to be one with God. The way of your whole life is to trust in the Lord. Joy and happiness are found in God's action on behalf of us sinners. As a forgiven sinner that is accepted by God, when you reflect upon this amazing gift of love, you can't help but be happy. Being righteous is not all about obeying all of the rules. That is what the Pharisees tried to compel upon the people. It is physically impossible. Only Jesus is free of sin. The rest of us sinners need repentance and forgiveness. The righteous are not sinless; they are made righteous by grace. Being forgiven is a life changing experience, an experience of being happy, and an experience of being in the right. It is an important dimension of human life. Facing up to our mistakes and being pardoned takes us way beyond any effort we can achieve on our own. You are dependent on God's steadfast love not human achievement.

I will conclude by phrasing it this way. It is impossible to be sinless but it is not impossible to be righteous. Seeing yourself as a child of God that is blessed and forgiven by God results in joy and happiness. Steer your life toward God. You will never be sinless but that is the direction. When a door closes it is a setback in life but it opens a door to reflect on God's love, grace, and forgiveness.