
When You've Made a Mess of your Life

DAVE BAST

It may be a small thing: A birthday forgotten; or something quite larger: A promise not kept, a broken vow, a life changed forever; but when you have done something that causes you to feel guilt, how do you handle that? Sometimes guilt can overwhelm us and make us feel like we could never make our lives right again. So when you have made a mess out of life, how can the book of Psalms help you to know what to say and do? Stay tuned.

BOB HEERSPINK

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Bob Heerspink.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

BOB HEERSPINK

Dave, you know, one of the favorite movie series that my wife and I enjoy is Toy Story, and I have to tell you, one of my favorite characters is Rex, and he has this great line, I think it is in the first film, where he says: Oh, now I have guilt. Every time he says that, you know, I relate because I find it is so easy for me to be triggered by the things of life. You know, I am not doing enough. I am not measuring up. Now I have guilt.

DAVE BAST

Well, Bob, I know you can identify with this and I do, too, because we are Calvinists, after all, right? And we are very good at guilt because we believe that no matter how bad you may feel about yourself, you are actually worse; so...

BOB HEERSPINK

There you go.

DAVE BAST

You can never have too much guilt, right?

BOB HEERSPINK

But you know, we live in a society that is really, I think, trying to push away the whole notion of guilt and sin; really trying to say: Hey, it really doesn't exist; and yet, everybody struggles with it, and sometimes for some pretty crazy reasons.

DAVE BAST

Well, I think that, really, that is sort of whistling in the dark, to tell people there is no such thing as guilt, or that sin doesn't really matter because deep down we cannot escape that; and you can repress it, you can suppress it, but it is not going to go away, and it will just work on you in different ways. There is no getting around the objective reality of guilt, but now it is true that sometimes people feel false guilt. They feel guilt for the wrong reasons or guilt that they shouldn't – inappropriate.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, I have sat with a lot of parishioners who I think have been feeling guilty about the wrong things. I mean, you sit with someone who says: You know, I have been asked to do this in church and I don't have the gifts for it, I don't have the time for it, and I feel so guilty that I said no. And I have said to them: Well, why do you feel guilty about that? I mean, that is just guilt you don't have to own.

DAVE BAST

Well, and people can use guilt to manipulate, too, can't they? I mean, we are good at that, too. You lay a guilt trip on somebody, as the phrase goes; and that is not always appropriate or fair either.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; or we set standards that really cannot be met. You know, I think of a student coming home from school and there are B's on the report card, and that is really a fair assessment of what that student can do, and she comes in the door and Dad looks at the card and says: Where are the A's? And you know, she is guilty about her grades, but she doesn't have to own that; she really doesn't.

DAVE BAST

Unfair expectations, yes, exactly. Yes, that is something that is laid on you that is not fair; or, how about the example – very common, I think, for a lot of us – an honest mistake or an accident that we are involved in. It is not really our fault, but something tragic happens; someone dies, a child perhaps; and the guilt is just horrible to bear; and even though everyone can come around and say: You know, you are not really guilty...

BOB HEERSPINK

There was no moral failing here.

DAVE BAST

Right; but you still feel it.

BOB HEERSPINK

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

So, there is a false kind of guilt, and we do need to try to escape that, or come to terms with it – come to realize that, no, this is not appropriate. I am not really guilty.

BOB HEERSPINK

You know, we are not God, and I think part of what I have done in pastoral ministry is to convince people that they don't have to take on responsibilities that are not theirs. So, you are right; I think we need to help people push away false guilt. On the other hand, I have also met people who have done some really morally reprehensible things and who say it is not a big deal.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; so, yes, here is the problem with guilt. A lot of us feel guilt when we shouldn't, and then a lot of us a lot of times don't feel guilt when we should. So, you know, getting to the bottom of this is an important thing for spiritual health and for psychological health as well.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, I think that there is a tendency in our society to say: Hey, you know what? Guilt is not real. When you are guilty, you are saying: Hey, I am standing before someone to whom I am responsible and I need to give an account. I think our society wants to push back from that. I think of sexual ethics. The notion that you feel guilty, for example, about sexual failings. People say: Hey, that is just hang-ups – that is just society's expectations being pushed on you; and yet, when I see the way people who really mess up morally in those

directions, how that chews them up, I say there is something going on there that is not just society's expectations. There is a deep-rooted sense of guilt that they are trying to atone for, deal with, that cannot simply be suppressed.

DAVE BAST

It is like Lady Macbeth; you know the famous scene at the end of the play where she is sleepwalking and she is rubbing her hands over and over, and says: Out, out, damned spot. Will these hands ne'er be clean? All the perfume in Arabia cannot cover what these hands have done. They are figuratively drenched with blood because she has abetted and aided her husband in murder, and then covering it up; and she is consumed by the guilt, and appropriately so. The guilt there is very real; and again, part of the way in which our society is messed up is that we feel the false guilt and don't know what to do with it, but we don't feel the real guilt that we should when we have offended – when we have hurt someone else intentionally, or through our actions, or when we have offended a holy God. There is another whole layer of guilt that we tend to dismiss.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, Dave, we have been looking at the Psalms in this series of programs, and really discovering that, in the Psalms God gives us words to speak in all kinds of situations. What you find in a psalm like Psalm 32, which is one of my favorite psalms, is what to say when you really make a mess out of life; and after we take a short break we will be back and we will explore what the psalmist says that helps us deal with the real nature of guilt in our lives.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

Hi. Welcome back to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. Along with my co-host, Bob Heerspink, I am Dave Bast.

So Bob, just before the break you drew our attention to the 32nd Psalm, which really gives us words to speak when we are dealing with the problem of real guilt, now; not false guilt, but we have messed up and we know we are guilty and we feel it. What do we say? What do we say to God? What do we say to others?

Listen to these wonderful words of David:

¹Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. ²Blessed are those whose sin the Lord does not count against them, and in whose spirit is no deceit. ³When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴For day and night your hand was heavy on me. My strength was sapped, as in the heat of summer. ⁵Then 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.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes. Dave, there are a lot of psalms in which we really do not know the background from which they emerged, but we can be pretty sure about *this* psalm. This psalm just speaks of that whole episode in David's life where he really made a mess of things with Bathsheba.

DAVE BAST

Right; the scripture tells the story in the book of 2 Samuel. David's army is off at war besieging a city, and David is up on the rooftop and he looks down and sees this beautiful woman who has just finished bathing herself in a purification rite, actually; and he wants her.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes. You know, a lot of people read that story and say: Oh, there is an affair going on here; but this is the king really getting what he wants.

DAVE BAST

Sure; it says he sent somebody to take her to the palace. I don't think Bathsheba had much choice in this matter.

BOB HEERSPINK

She is not really culpable in this.

DAVE BAST

He is abusing his position of power, yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

Exactly; and then, once she becomes pregnant, he decides to abuse his power even more.

DAVE BAST

Sure, because he wants to cover it up. I mean, who doesn't? Don't the rich and powerful always cover up their misdeeds?

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; this passage even talks about deceit, and how what we do – our mess-ups – lead to deceit. Well, that is what happens in David's life. He arranges that Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba, would be put at the very front line so he is going to be cut down; and after he is killed, well then, he is free to take Bathsheba for a wife.

DAVE BAST

Yes, it is even worse than that because first he brings Uriah back on leave. He says: Send me Uriah, and he figures, you know, Uriah is going to do what soldiers do; he is going to go be with his wife while he is home on leave; but Uriah is too noble for that. He says: No, not while my comrades are in the front lines; I am not going to do that. And David, you know, kind of tears his hair out: What do you do now? Well, you kill the guy. So, he arranges that. I mean, it is a story worthy of any Mafioso or any really seamy, dirty politician. And this is David – the man after God's own heart!

BOB HEERSPINK

Which shows how close sin is to us all; and it is going to take Nathan, it is going to take the prophet of God giving a direct word to David that is going to bring him to his knees.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know, I also love this about the story. If you read the story in 2 Samuel Chapter 10 and 11, there is one little verse at the end that says:

^{27b}But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.

You know, nobody is going to bring it up. There is no independent journalist who is going to dig up the dirt and publish it on the Internet, you know. Nobody in the court is going to dare to challenge David; but there is one who knows and sees what happened, and that is a God who is righteous and who won't stand for that sort of thing.

BOB HEERSPINK

You see, David is covering up; he is covering up, but he cannot cover it up from God.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

God sees.

DAVE BAST

Right.

BOB HEERSPINK

And you know, I think this passage so illustrates the kind of deceit that we get into. Sin breeds sin; and when you deal with this kind of situation, the most common sin is simply lying. You have to start creating your own reality until finally people begin to lose, I think, a sense of what lies they have told to whom, to keep things all under wraps.

DAVE BAST

One lie leads to another. Mark Twain once said: Tell the truth and you won't have to remember what you said.

BOB HEERSPINK

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

But this idea that we are deceitful even to ourselves; we begin to blind ourselves to reality; and then the psalm said David gives a testimony as to what happened during this period in Psalm 32. "Day and night your hand was heavy on me," he says to God. "When I kept silent my bones wasted away through my groaning. My strength was sapped." So, guilt was eating him up.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; even in this situation where you don't see it happening, you know; before Nathan confronts him, the suggestion is – the implication is – this is just chewing him up inside emotionally.

DAVE BAST

And you know, I really think that that is an act of God's grace in David's life. You know, when we feel guilt and should feel it when it is the right moment for guilt because we are guilty in the eyes of God, you know the worst thing he could do is let us just kind of slide away because that would end in our destruction. It is an act of God's favor that he stirs us up, and as you said, sends ultimately the prophet to speak God's word into David's life.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, it is not a good thing when we can lie with impunity.

DAVE BAST

Right; we are just hardened to it.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, I see that with my kids. When my kids were growing up every once in a while, you know, they would try to cover something up, and then it would come out, and you could just see the relief that they had. It was like: Oh, I am so glad that is out. And that is true of all of us. I mean, to try to keep all the ping pong balls pushed down in the trunk and not let any one of them pop up takes a huge amount of effort; and that is what we are trying to do when we try to suppress the truth in our own lives.

DAVE BAST

So, David is unsuccessful at his cover-up. He cannot even cover his sin himself and try to ignore it or forget about it because God has not forgotten about it; and there is this nagging sense going on that it is not all right, even though he is the king; and in the night, maybe, when he is alone, in his secret moments he feels this kind of inward...

BOB HEERSPINK

Pressure.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; he is being consumed.

BOB HEERSPINK

He is going to explode.

DAVE BAST

Yes, so what does happen? How do we cover it – uncover it – or get the sin properly covered; uncover our guilt, get rid of it...

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, you see, it was so complex for David, and then God comes along and says: I have a very simple answer for you.

DAVE BAST

Simple but hard.

BOB HEERSPINK

Simple but hard.

DAVE BAST

Because it means we have to be honest with God and we have to confess.

BOB HEERSPINK

And we will talk about that when we come back in just a minute.

Segment 3

BOB HEERSPINK

Welcome back to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. Dave, just before the break, we were talking about God's answer to our guilt, and we said it is both so simple and it is so hard; and in verse 5, the psalmist talks about the answer – David talks about the answer:

⁵Then 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.

DAVE BAST

What is really significant about this, I think, is the connection between covering and forgiveness.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes.

DAVE BAST

So, we can try to cover up our sins – deny them – suppress them – try to explain away our feelings of guilt and convince ourselves that they are inappropriate or they are sick or not real; and our sin never gets forgiven and our guilt never really goes away; or we can uncover our sin in confession to God and then he covers them himself. Listen to verse 1 again:

Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. So, there; God has to cover our sins in a different way, and then he can forgive them.

BOB HEERSPINK

Now, that means sin really does matter. You cannot just say this does not count because God says it really does. I mean, this is so serious that this sin is going to have to be covered by someone; but you cannot do it yourself. God says: I am going to have to do it for you.

DAVE BAST

I am going to have to do it for you, and I cannot just wave a magic wand and say: Everything is forgiven. No problems. No losers; everyone is a winner. NO, because sin is real and guilt is objective, and it has to be dealt with; and this wonderful idea of covering makes me think of one of the most important words in the Bible, and it actually begins in Exodus 25, where it is a description of the cover that was put on the ark of the covenant... you know that...

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, I was thinking of the same thing, but keep going.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; okay. Bible scholars, when they translated that word... it is *kapporet* in Hebrew, and it means both a covering literally and kind of an atonement or a payment in blood for sin; and Bible scholars struggled with how to translate that, and it was William Tyndale, the first translator of the English Bible who came up with this beautiful word: Mercy Seat. The Mercy Seat is the place where the ark is covered, and where the blood was placed by the priest on the Day of Atonement.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, and then you take that into the New Testament and you say: Why did Christ have to die? Why did he have to shed his blood? There is so much emphasis in the New Testament about the shedding of the blood, but the blood is the covering...

DAVE BAST

Right.

BOB HEERSPINK

The sacrifice that Christ gave to cover our sins.

DAVE BAST

And there is one fabulous verse in Romans Chapter 3 verse 26, where Paul uses the Greek word for *kapporet* – the Greek translation – for the Mercy Seat, and he says: Christ is that Mercy Seat; he is that atoning sacrifice that God has given. So, his blood ultimately is what covers our sins, and dare we say, enables God to forgive us? I mean, without this, even God cannot forgive.

BOB HEERSPINK

See, that is something we have to talk about, because it says in verse 5: Then I acknowledged my sin – I confessed it. You know, why did he have to confess it? Why couldn't God say: Well, it is all covered even without your confession. And who do you confess to? You know, that has been a question that we have asked through the history of the Church.

DAVE BAST

Sure. Do you have to confess a sin in order to have it be forgiven?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, I think the answer to that, if you mean specific sins, you know, that is going to tie us up in knots. I have talked to people who have this notion that unless I go through my entire life and confess every sin, I will get to Judgment Day and God will say: You know, you missed about 2-1/2 million, and you didn't make it. That kind of approach is very... that is wrong-headed, because we not only commit sins, but sin has a grip upon us, and Christ breaks us from that. We don't have to live in fear that because I have not confessed a specific sin, it is not forgiven.

DAVE BAST

But then, what is the link between confession and forgiveness?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, one of the things, I think, is that when we confess, we are honest with God about ourselves and about who we are; and if a sin were pointed out to me and I would not confess it, that, I think, would be a problem; but I think the other side of it is, who do you confess to? You know, Protestants have this tendency to say: Well, it is just between me and God. You know, I confess my sins in my prayer closet and in my personal devotions, but I don't need to talk to anybody else about my sins. I don't have to confess to others. Where is the line when it comes to confessing sins to other people?

DAVE BAST

Well, I think there is something to say on behalf of that; but first, I would rather get back to this idea of confessing to God, and why that is important. It seems to me that ultimately forgiveness is relational; it is in the context of relationships; and the problem we have when we are trying to still cover up our sins, even from God and from ourselves, as you said, it is a problem of honesty. If we are not honest with God and open about this, we are distancing ourselves from him. It is pretty clear to me that God's forgiveness – his covering blood of sacrifice – is for those who are in a relationship with him.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

For those who have turned to him and simply by faith entrusted themselves to him, and some people don't want that. They resist that.

BOB HEERSPINK

At the end of the day, it is a matter of saying it is grace. When we talk about confession and covering, it is saying my whole relationship to you, Lord, is dependent on your mercy, your grace; it is not about me.

DAVE BAST

So confession, fundamentally, to God is about being honest with him...

BOB HEERSPINK

That is right.

DAVE BAST

And simply trying to open and not hide, which he can see anyway; but then, the question of confessing to others... well, I think that is a little bit more difficult. Certainly those whom we have hurt and who know about how we have hurt them, there is a duty for us to confess to them, too; again to try to restore broken relationships; but if we have done something secretly against a spouse, say, and then we are convicted of it, we confess to God, we experience his forgiveness, do we have to then go the next step and confess to that person as well?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, maybe it is a matter of saying: Okay, why am I doing this? Am I really doing it to help the other person, or is it about me? I mean, we could almost use confession as a way to hurt people.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; you can say too much, probably; and do too much damage; but then, there is a third situation, and that is where maybe you have a trusted friend or a spiritual advisor or a pastor, a counselor of some kind, and I think there is a real argument for confessing to another person for two reasons: One, it shows how serious we are in wanting to get rid of that sin. Do we really want to be delivered from it? Well then, sometimes the

best way is to have someone hold us accountable; and secondly, there is just something valuable in hearing from another human being, “God forgives you.”

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, absolutely; you know, I have said to people, the Lord’s forgiveness is so often channeled through the voice of a pastor or that mentor – that counselor – and I think people can often live within the prison house of their own guilt for years and years, not realizing that they really are set free; and it takes that voice of another person speaking on behalf of the Lord to say: You really are forgiven.

DAVE BAST

So here is the bottom line: When you have messed up your life, or made a mess of things, learn to say with David: I will confess my sins to the Lord, and then experience with him: And you forgave the guilt of my sin. That is the Good News of the Gospel.

BOB HEERSPINK

That is right.

DAVE BAST

So thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation today, and don’t forget, it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that will keep our topics relevant to your life. So tell us what you think about what you are hearing and suggest what you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Just visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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Printed on June 18, 2026