

Vegetables of Confession: It's Good for You

Psalm 32 (NIV)

Of David. A maskil. ¹ Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. ² Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. ³ When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. ⁵ Then 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. ⁶ Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them. ⁷ You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. ⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. ⁹ Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. ¹⁰ Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him. ¹¹ Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!

The kid pokes the Brussel sprouts remaining on his plate. "Eat your vegetables. They're good for you," says Dad. Doesn't every kid automatically think when hearing this phrase, "How can something so disgusting, so unappealing, actually be good for me?" Then either the kid chokes it down out of obligation in order to finally leave the dinner table or to get the sweet reward of dessert. Or the battle of wills fully engages to see who is more stubborn on the vegetable topic: the parent or the child. Who will give in first?

There's an aspect of our worship and our relationship with God that maybe feels like being forced to eat your vegetables. It comes early on in our typical services: the confession of our sins, the Brussel sprouts of our worship. For many, it's jarring and unappealing because you've arrived for worship, you're happy to be here, you sang the first hymn and are looking forward to being built up and refreshed and renewed by the Word of God, and then you have to solemnly speak those words that you're totally a poor, miserable sinner in thought, word, and deed, by what you have done and by what you have left undone, not loving God with your whole heart, mind, and strength nor loving your neighbor as yourself, not forgiving others as you have been forgiven by God. You admit that you have been anything but Christ-like through another week, and this grieves God, pushes him away from you. Maybe this confession hits even harder during Lent because we have a specific silent time to pause and reflect on our own personal sins, forcing us to recall them. "Pastor, why do you start worship by bringing us down and reminding us of all our sins? We came here for joy, for happiness. Can't you focus on the positive? Aren't you being more like the parent telling us to eat our vegetables when you tell us to confess our sins?"

You should hate confessing your sins, reliving your failures and your faults, feeling bad and remorseful for the things that you've done. That guilt wells up and we've been trying to push it down. I don't want to talk about it. I don't want to think about it. I want to forget that it ever happened. Stubbornly like a horse or a mule, we refuse to confess our sins saying that it's too gross and unappealing and will do more harm than good.

David, the writer of our psalm today, had sins that he didn't want to confess. This psalm doesn't tell us what that particular sin is. We know that he had failings as a leader, as a father, and, most notoriously, as a husband. He had an affair with another man's wife and got her pregnant. When he couldn't conceal the pregnancy, he arranged the murder of her husband in a way that made him look like a casualty of war.

For up to a year David held on to this sin, not acknowledging it, not confessing it, just trying to push it down and ignore it. How well did that work? "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer." (verses 3-4) He felt as if his life was wasting away. All of his strength was sapped. He felt weighed down. His conscience accused him and plagued him so much that he groaned all day long. Maybe groaning is not a great English translation. The word more connotes a roaring. This is a painful expression - not so much a mild moaning, but cries of pain. Holding in his sin and refusing to repent hurt him. There was no joy and no relief for David while he refused to eat the vegetables of confession.

Sadly, it's a universal experience to try to hide sin. We did it as kids; we still do it as adults. We hate eating the vegetables of confession because they make us feel guilty and ashamed of what we did. We try to justify refusing to eat them by telling ourselves that it would ruin the person's day if I tell them the bad thing that I did. It will lower their opinion of me, and I worked so hard to get my reputation to where it is. I'll hold off for an opportune time, a time when they will be more receptive and less critical of me. And so we cover it up. But then we become paranoid. What if they find out? What if they find out without me telling them? It'll

compound the sin. We end up always looking over our shoulders, stressed out at the idea that they just might find out. How long can I keep silent and keep my sin hidden? What will happen when it all comes out? We waste away and groan in pain of unconfessed sin.

Let's be straight forward and know that we should not expect it to go well to uncover our sins before others, confessing them. There will be some relief that you're no longer hiding it or being the only one internally struggling with this and groaning over it. But that doesn't eliminate the sin, the guilt, or the consequences of it. And it might actually plague your conscience in a different way that someone else is now bearing the burden of your confession, that they have to live knowing the sin you confessed to them.

In a marriage class that I've taught, there are interviews with couples and their struggles and experiences in their marriages. In one of the sadder stories, the wife admitted to having an affair after a time of her husband neglecting her in favor of his work. When he found out and confronted her, he decided then to confess that he too had had an affair, thinking that they could relate over this. Instead, it drove them further apart knowing that it wasn't all on her but now she felt justified in cheating on her husband because he had already cheated on her. The unconfessed sin caused even more pain and hurt when it was finally exposed, a little like the pain you endure while your parents glare at you while you refuse to eat your Brussel sprouts.

Something finally prompted David to confess his sin. It may have been a confrontation from the prophet Nathan or just personal reflection, but David finally ate his vegetables of confession. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." (verse 5a) What would be the response? Would God forgive him? Would I have to earn it, prove to him that I really had abandoned the sin? God responded with absolution. "And you forgave the guilt of my sin." (verse 5b)

David was finally relieved! "Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit." (verses 1-2) He was forgiven! His sins, whatever they were, however much they had plagued his life and weighed him down causing him to groan in pain, they were now gone. His Lord, his Savior, had taken them away. The debt of his sin was not ignored by God, but it was paid for by the promised Savior – the same one that came and lived for us. Jesus gave his life in payment for David's sins and ours. As he did with David, Christ did not and does not take a single ounce of repayment from us for paying for our sins. We all stand before God debt free, sins forgiven!

David ate the vegetables of confessing his sins, as awful as it was. In doing so, he was completely exposed before God. What would be the consequences of confessing? Whatever they would be, David had God and so he had a safe place with him. David encourages all believers to eat their vegetables of confession knowing that the Lord forgives and protects us in that forgiveness. "Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance." (verses 6-7)

"Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him." (verse 10) Holding on to our sins, keeping them to ourselves, refusing to eat the vegetables of confession, only hurts us, gives us many woes. Your parents were right when they said that vegetables were good for you, that they gave your body needed nutrition. You can look up what exactly that nutrition is. But when it comes to the vegetables of confession, David wants us to know that confession doesn't taste good but is so very nutritious for our spiritual health. Holding on to sin only hurts us and our relationship with God. Confessing our sins exposes us before God and others, but God is our hiding place, protected by his full and free gift of forgiveness. When we confess, we find God already holding out total and free forgiveness.

Let us never stubbornly refuse like a horse or mule to confess our sins. Instead, confess them. Confess them to God. Confess them to the people we have wronged. Maybe confess them to your pastor. I don't expect you to ever like that part. But just as we do in our service, you get to immediately hear that the Lord has forgiven the guilt of your sin. You are blessed – blessed because your transgressions are forgiven, your sins are covered, the LORD does not count them against you, and your spirit now has no deceit being covered with Christ's forgiveness and his perfection.

So, "Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!" (verse 11) Rejoice that even though the vegetables of confession don't taste good, they are very good for you. Rejoice as you confess because the LORD forgives every single sin every single time and never accepts even an ounce of repayment for taking care the debt of our sins. Amen.