

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: August 13, 2017
Lesson Title: "The Cleansing"
Lesson Passage: Psalm 32:1-11

ABOUT THIS LESSON

Psalm 32 begins on a note of joy, for this is a prayer offered by a man whose sins have been forgiven and who has experienced divine healing as a result. In addition to praising God for his protective care, he tells how the Lord led him to submit to His will and concludes with an exhortation for all to praise the Lord.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

- (1) Explain the relationship between sin and sickness in O.T. thinking.
- (2) Describe the turning point in the life of the psalmist.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Begin with this story: Gert Behanna grew up in the home of a multi-millionaire, and, at one time, was one of the wealthiest women in America. But her money didn't bring happiness. She described herself as "very wealthy and very bored." Before she was fifty years old her life was in a shambles. She became addicted to both alcohol and drugs, went through three broken marriages and suffered constantly from painful psychotic illnesses. She even failed to accomplish attempted suicide. Her doctor urged her to seek psychiatric treatment; but, instead, she sought God. At the age of 53, she knelt by her bed in a New York hotel room, threw herself on the Lord's mercy, and was gloriously saved! Later, recalling this experience, she said, "When I got to my feet again, I felt like I had just had a spiritual shower bath!" She spent the rest of her life as a Christian speaker, writer, and philanthropist. *Then say:* "The writer of Psalm 32 had much in common with Gert Behanna, for he began his psalm with the joyful words, "Happy are those whose sins are forgiven, whose wrongs are pardoned" (Psalm 32:1, TEV).

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. *Suggest that the theme of Psalm 32 is summed up in the first two verses. Read vv. 1-2, then add these comments:* (1) The word "blessed" includes happiness, but goes beyond this, because it also means "peace" and "freedom." All three experiences come to one who enters a harmonious relationship with God through divine forgiveness and cleansing. (2) Three synonyms for sin appear in verse 1. "Transgression" indicates disobedience, rebellion against God's will. "Sin" is misconduct, bad behavior. "Iniquity" is moral wrong, evil. And the last word in v. 2, "deceit," stands for lying, hypocrisy, fraud. (*Note that deceit resides in the "spirit," i.e., the inner self, the person's character.*) (3) In vv. 1-2, three words describe cleansing from sin: "forgiven" means "carried away"; "imputes no iniquity" means "considers to be innocent"; "is covered" means "concealed in a way that it is no longer seen."

2. *Observe that verses 3-4 describe the psalmist's condition before he had confessed his sins and received forgiveness.* (In that day, illness and trouble were regarded as punishment for sin, and confession and repentance were prerequisite to forgiveness and well-being.): (1) As long as he refused to confess his sin, his body grew weaker and weaker (literally, "my bones wasted away") and he was continuously weeping (KJV, "my roaring all the day long") (v. 3). (2) His strength was drained, as moisture is dried up by summer heat (v. 4). NOTE: The Lord's hand was "heavy upon him" night and day (v. 4). Though he was suffering because of his unconfessed sin, the redeeming truth is that he was not without God, for God's hand was on him. His distress was actually the mercy of God driving him to the place where he could be healed. "For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves" (Heb. 12:6; Prov. 3:11-12).

3. *Note that Ps. 32:5 describes the turning point in the psalmist's experience, his decision to confess his sins to God.* ((A good biblical commentary on this verse is Proverbs 28:13.)

4. *Comment on Psalm 32:6-7:* Having been inspired by the blessing that he has experienced as a result of "coming clean" with God, the psalmist eagerly shares that experience with fellow worshipers. NOTE: Textual variations in Hebrew manuscripts have made the meaning of the last line of v. 7 difficult to determine. But a translation that makes good sense is "thou dost encompass me with shouts of deliverance." This would mean that the fellow worshipers surrounding the psalmist are shouting praises to the Lord. This could read, for example: "You surround me with the shouts of those who rejoice in my deliverance."

5. *Explain vv. 8-9:* Inspired by the valuable lesson he has learned through his experience with a forgiving God, the psalmist now turns to those who need instruction about the way of life, particularly the young and inexperienced, and urges them to learn from his mistakes. His advice in v. 9, "Don't be like a horse or a mule that needs a hand upon the reins and a bit in the mouth to compel obedience," reflects his own stubborn resistance to repentance. He had waited until the consequences of his guilt had produced devastating results. Rather, he advises, they should make a confession at the first onset of sin, and so escape the suffering that finally compels submission.

6. *Summarize the meaning of the closing verses (vv. 10-11):* The psalmist concludes his testimony by contrasting the lot of the righteous with that of the wicked. The righteous are invited to join him in songs of praise to the Lord.

CLOSING THE LESSON

A final thought: 1 John 1:8-9 is a classic biblical comment on the psalmist's experience: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."