

Our Instinct To Hide

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[0 : 00] Well, tonight I'd like us to turn back to Psalm 32 and we can read again at verse 7.

You are a hiding place for me. You preserve me from trouble. You surround me with shouts of deliverance.

Psalm 32 is one of my favorite Psalms. It's an incredibly powerful Psalm. And part of what makes it so powerful is that it talks about one of the most powerful instincts that we have.

It's an instinct that I think is especially strong in childhood, but it's one that never goes away as we move into adulthood. It's an instinct that can have a massive impact on our behavior, especially when something goes wrong.

It's an instinct that I think still affects our general lives, but it's one that definitely affects our spiritual lives.

[1 : 04] What am I talking about? I'm talking about our instinct to hide. That's our title. Let me start by giving you two examples.

On my first day of primary one, I didn't want to go hated it and I cried my eyes out.

I can still remember sitting in the class. I can remember crying and reaching out my hand like this as my mother had to walk out through the door.

It was awful. What I understand now as a parent is that it would have been even more awful for my mother than it was for me. I think my mother quite often watches, so I am very sorry for that. That's one of the many things I need to apologize for in terms of my childhood.

I hated it, did not like school. The next day, I didn't want to go back. I had this brilliant idea. I refused to put on my uniform and instead I put on the dirtiest, scruffiest clothes that I could find and I hid.

[2 : 13] Sadly, my genius plan didn't work and I was found and I was changed into my uniform and I had to go to school.

That was when I was four years old. The second example though is something that I've done as a 30-something year old.

When you preach, sometimes it's a really encouraging experience. Sometimes you feel very carried along by the Holy Spirit as you preach.

I think we would maybe call the old fashioned way we described that was having liberty. It's an amazing thing to experience. Even to be honest, even this morning, I couldn't believe it when my watch beeped for 12 o'clock because it just seemed to go in a flash.

It's wonderful when you feel carried along by the Holy Spirit like that, but it's not always like that.

Sometimes you preach, maybe I probably shouldn't say this, but sometimes you're preaching and it just feels like a disaster.

[3 : 17] It feels like a car crash in slow motion. It feels like nobody can understand what you're saying. It feels like you're not making any sense. It feels like you're boring everybody to death, that you're doing a terrible job and that you're not doing justice to the incredible message that's in front of you in God's word.

Preaching often feels like that. When that happens, after the service, there is an overwhelming feeling that comes over me.

I feel like I just want to hide. In fact, in my mind, both in Carlyway Free Church and in St. Columbus Free Church in Edinburgh, where I've also served, in both these churches, there is an imaginary tap door in the floor towards the back of the church in my mind.

When I feel like a sermon has gone badly, I imagine myself just opening that door, climbing in, closing it, and hiding until everybody has gone home.

All of that reveals that I'm a complex mix of insecurity, fear, pride, and lots of other things that mean that I just want to run away and hide when things are not going the way I want them to.

[4 : 35] Now, maybe I'm the only person in here who feels like that, in which case I am weird, but you knew that anyway. Or maybe there's times when we all feel like that.

When things go wrong, so often an instinctive response is that we just want to hide. Psalm 32 is getting us to think about all of that.

It's confronting us with two questions that I want us to look together tonight. Question one, do you have something to hide?

Question two, do you have somewhere to hide? First of all, do you have something to hide?

This Psalm was written by David, and the background to the Psalm is his tragic sin with a woman called Bathsheba. You can read the account of that in 1 Samuel chapter 11 and chapter 12.

[5 : 40] Basically it's a story of hiding. David was king, and his army was away fighting against an enemy, but he had stayed home, and one day he was walking on the roof, and he saw a beautiful woman bathing herself.

He sent messengers to get her, and she was taken to David when she arrived, he slept with her. And afterwards she went back to her house, and the plan was that David's one night stand would be kept hidden.

However, David had got Bathsheba pregnant. When he finds out, he tries to hide it. So first thing he does is he sends for Bathsheba's husband, Uriah the Hittite, to come back from the army.

David's thinking, if he comes back, he'll go home. Everybody will think that once Bathsheba's pregnant, it's because he's come back, and it'll all be hidden. But Uriah refuses to go home.

He refuses to sleep in his house because the rest of the soldiers are still fighting, and he refuses to go back to his own bed. So that plan didn't work. So next, David tries something else in order to hide it.

[6 : 55] He arranges for Uriah to be killed in battle, which is exactly what happens. Once Uriah's dead, David then takes Bathsheba to be his wife, and that makes it look like her pregnancy is just a result of their marriage.

And again, David is trying to keep everything hidden. The whole thing then culminates in a devastating statement at the end of 1 Samuel 11.

And when the morning was over, David sent and brought Bathsheba to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.

And if you read on into chapter 12 of 1 Samuel, you read about how the prophet Nathan is sent by God to confront David. And the whole thing that David tried to hide is exposed.

Amazingly, the outcome of the whole story is one of incredible forgiveness, mercy, and healing from God. But at the time, all of that hiding that David tried to do was crushing him.

[8 : 07] And he describes how it felt in this Psalm. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

For day and night, your hand was heavy upon me. My strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. David had something to hide.

But the more he hid it, the more it crushed him. And healing only came when he stopped trying to hide it.

I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

And in so many ways, the great theme of Psalm 32 is the incredible blessing of knowing God's forgiveness. All of this, I think, is immensely relevant, because I think it's the case that for every single one of us in here, we all have things in our lives that we want to hide.

[9 : 18] I look at myself and I see mistakes that I've made in my life. I see sins that I struggle with. I see habits that are unhealthy, and I just want to hide it all.

I want to pretend that they aren't there. I want to put on an outward impression that conceals my inward failings and insecurities. I want to keep the weaknesses hidden and keep the outside looking good.

And I think we're all like that. We do it in relation to other people, and we do it with God. A good way to test that, and the whole idea that we're sinners and that we have something to hide, that's something that people struggle with.

Some people really don't like the biblical doctrine of sin, the idea that we're sinners and that everyone's guilty before God. But a good test of the whole thing is to ask yourself, if you were to approach the national media and say to them, you can have full access to my life and you can

expose absolutely anything that you find.

I don't think that there's a person alive today who could say that and feel comfortable. But despite the reality of our sin, as we come before God, it can still be very, very hard to admit that we're wrong.

[10:56] It can still be very, very easy to try and hide things. Our walk with God can be greatly hindered because of our instinct to hide.

Now, this is where we see something very important in this Psalm that is very easy to miss. When we read Psalm 32, we find ourselves reading all about confessing our sin and finding forgiveness. In many ways, that's what lies at the heart of the gospel, that Jesus has come so that our sins can be forgiven. Because of that, we read Psalm 32 and our minds can very easily be drawn to thinking about somebody coming to faith in Jesus.

That's a good thing in lots of ways. That's one of the amazing things about becoming a Christian. Through faith in Jesus, our sins are forgiven. Our guilt is washed away. We have peace with God. And if anybody here or anyone watching online is not yet a Christian, that is what the gospel is offering you. All you have to do is put your trust in Jesus. All you have to do is ask him to forgive you and you will be able to sing this Psalm with all your heart when it says, how blessed the one who has received forgiveness for his sin.

[12:15] Please, please don't ever sit here and think that hiding your sin is the answer. It never is. If you trust in Jesus, you'll know the incredible blessing of forgiveness.

But the thing that's easy to miss is that this Psalm is not really about somebody becoming a believer.

Even though so much of what I've said is too irrelevant and urgent, it's not really what the Psalm is talking about. The Psalm is written by David.

And when David sinned with Bathsheba, he had been a believer for years. Psalm 32 is not the words of an unbeliever coming to faith.

Psalm 32 is the words of a believer who has completely stuffed up in their walk with the Lord. And that means that Psalm 32 is actually more about sanctification than it is about conversion.

[13:26] So if you were trying to think of a present day equivalent to this Psalm, you shouldn't be thinking about something that you would see in the headlines on the news.

You shouldn't be thinking about an unconverted movie director who uses his influence to make actresses sleep with him. You shouldn't be thinking about an unconverted footballer using his wealth and his status to get women to have sex with him.

Or you shouldn't be thinking about an unconverted businesswoman who seduces men who work in her office. What you should really be thinking of is a minister who slept with a secretary, or an elder or a deacon who slept with a woman he works with, or a youth worker who slept with someone in their student group.

And you think that is shocking. Yet that's exactly what David did and worse.

And he did it as a believer. And that's what I want us to see. David did this as a believer. Now, I am absolutely sure that there is nobody in here who's done anything as scandalous as David or as the examples that have just given, but what I want us to recognize is that even for much lesser sins, the principle is the same.

[14:52] As Christians, we sin. We make huge mistakes and we can so easily think that the answer is to hide them.

And it can happen in lots and lots of ways. We can hide the fact that we're not talking to somebody. We can hide the fact that we struggle with lust or alcohol or gambling. We can hide the fact that we're greedy, that we struggle to control our anger, that we're jealous, that we take pleasure in revenge.

We can hide the fact that we aren't willing to forgive someone who's hurt us. And that's why even as Christians, we've got to ask the question, do you have something to hide?

Do I? And am I trying to hide that from God? And I think this is where it's important to recognize that we really need to be specific with God.

[16:09] I say that because I think it's possible to pray every day and say, Lord, I'm a sinner, please forgive me. And yet at the same time, be hiding a specific sin from Him.

Or as I say, well, trying to hide because obviously He knows anyway. It's actually very easy to say to God, I'm a sinner, please forgive me.

That's quite easy to say. It's a lot harder to say, Lord, I am so sorry that I lost my temper with and then say their name.

Or to say, Lord, I am so sorry that I'm harboring lustful thoughts about and then say their name. Or to say, Lord, I'm so sorry for being so intensely jealous of and saying their name.

But unless we do, the sin will continue to eat away at us because all we're trying to do is hide it. That hiding will damage us.

[17:19] It will damage our relationship with others and it will damage our relationship with God. And one of the great lessons of this Psalm is that hiding our sins never works.

Whenever we feel that instinct to hide our sin from God, the worst thing that we can do is follow that instinct. Instead, we can openly and freely confess our sins before God.

And the amazing thing is that He's promised. He has promised that He will always, always forgive us. And if you think about it, confessing sin is simply an unhiding.

You're just acknowledging it before God, bringing it to Him, openly confessing our sins. And the incredible thing is that when you unhide that sin, what happens?

It gets wiped away. Unconfessed sin is like a piece of paper with all your sins written on it and all you're doing is turning the piece of paper over and leaving it face down in the table.

[18:33] The writing's still there, but you're just hiding it. Confessing your sin is turning the sheet of paper over, putting it in front of God and everything written on it gets erased.

That is what God is offering us. That's why when we feel like we've got something to hide, this Psalm is reminding us that we can unhide it before God.

We can confess it before Him. He will forgive us. He will wipe it all away. But that's not all that God gives us, and that's not all that this Psalm talks about, because the Psalm doesn't just get us to think about the things we want to hide.

It's also getting us to think about where we go to hide ourselves. And that takes us to our second question. Do you have somewhere to hide?

And I'm asking that question because our instinct to hide doesn't just manifest itself in our desire to hide stuff from God to conceal our sins and mistakes. It also means that when we struggle, we look for somewhere to hide ourselves, like my imaginary trapdoor at the back of the church that I just want to go and hide in after a terrible sermon.

[19:59] Same back in day two of primary one, my number one tactic was to hide. And I've done it in a thousand ways since, and I'm sure you are the same.

When life is tough, when things go wrong, when we feel vulnerable and exposed, we look for places to hide. And these places where we hide can be good, they can be neutral, and they can be bad.

So one of my favorite hiding places is in a hug from Yuna. That's a good hiding place, and I've had to hide there many, many times when I've struggled, when I've failed, or when I've been hurt by other people.

Much less romantically, another favorite hiding place of mine is BBC Sport. That's a much more neutral hiding place, but it's not a terrible place to go. Sometimes when you're busy, overwhelmed with work, it's like, I'm just going to see what's happening in terms of sport.

And Books is also a place I like to go to hide. That again is okay, not good, not bad, just neutral. A not so good hiding place that I would definitely be tempted by is food.

[21:11] So I would definitely be a comfort eater if I let myself. And yeah, that's a damaging place I could go if that got out of hand.

What are your hiding places? There's plenty of good ones, and the good ones are good ones. A nice walk, time in the garden, a good book or a good movie, exercise, a holiday, playing a game, they are all good hiding places.

But more importantly, we also need to ask the question, do you have any bad hiding places?

And that question really is crucial because there's a lot of bad hiding places that people can go to. And we see it all around us.

People will go to alcohol as a hiding place. People will look for some kind of sexual fulfillment, whether that's in pornography or in trying to find somebody to sleep with at the weekend or whatever it might be.

[22:23] People will look for that as a hiding place. Less kind of controversially, but still damaging. Some people will hide in just excessive work, just work, work, work, work, work, work, work, and just absolutely obsessing over that.

Maybe shopping, buying stuff, like things go wrong, I'm going to just buy stuff. And we do talk about retail therapy, and under control it's not a bad thing. Out of control, it's not good at all.

Vinging on rubbish on TV, getting sucked into too much stuff on social media, or maybe even just literally hiding in your house and just thinking, I'm not going to let anybody anywhere near me.

We all have our hiding places. The place where we want to go when we feel rubbish, when we feel weak, when all we want is to feel safe and secure.

Sam 32 tells you where the absolute best hiding place is. Or in fact, more accurately, Sam 32 tells you who the absolute best hiding place is.

[23 : 36] The best hiding place is God. And that is described so beautifully in one of my favorite verses in the whole Bible, you are a hiding place for me.

That verse is just written for the boy who hid on day two of primary one. You are my hiding place. You preserve me from trouble.

You surround me with shouts of deliverance. That verse tells us something utterly amazing. It tells us that as we come to God for forgiveness for our sins, he doesn't just say to you, look, it's okay, you don't need to hide your sins anymore.

He doesn't just say, look, it's okay, I'll forgive you. He doesn't just say, you know, you can stand before me and you'll be acquitted.

He grabs you and holds you and hides you forever. He takes you in his arms and he will protect you.

[24 : 49] He will never let you go and he will make you absolutely safe. And that's incredible. The God who we have sinned against, the one who we have let down more than any other, the one who's got every reason to tell us that we've blown it.

He grabs us and holds us and keeps us hidden safe and secure forever. And that's just incredible that God would do that.

One of the things that makes our instinct to hide so strong, one of the things that makes hiding so appealing is that it makes us feel like we're surrounded by something that we need.

It might be a warm duvet when we're tucked in bed tonight. It might be the walls of our living room when there's a gale blowing like there was last night. It might be just, you know, letting the football news run round in our head as we're trying to relax after a hard day.

It might be the great storyline that we've read in the book we're reading or in the movie that we've just watched. When we hide, we are surrounding ourselves with something that makes us feel better, that makes it feel like things are going to be okay.

[26 : 00] If you take that feeling and multiply it by a million, that is what God wants to do with you.

And Sam 32.7 describes it so brilliantly, says, you surround me with shouts of deliverance. Just think about that.

You think, you know, you think about David, you think about us. We stuff up. We feel so guilty. We feel exposed and vulnerable and weak and useless. And all the time God is holding us and not only is he holding us, he is shouting, it's okay.

You are safe. You are totally safe. I've got you and I'm never, ever letting you go. You've been delivered, totally delivered from whatever mistakes you've made.

In fact, the word shouts that you've got there, it can also be translated songs. And so that's just a wonderful image as well. God is holding you and he is singing about how safe you are.

[27 : 09] That has got to be a better hiding place than another drink or another movie or whatever it is that the world around us might go chasing after. And what I want you to see is that this Psalm is telling you what the gospel is offering you, what the gospel has given you.

If you are a Christian, the gospel is offering you an eternal hiding place. And that hiding place will satisfy your instinct to hide like nothing else.

It's just so good. God is so good with him. You are so safe. You can come to him at any time, no matter how rubbish your day is, no matter how many mistakes you've made and you can say, Father, please hide me.

And his reply is, I already am and I'm never, ever going to stop. In God, you find the absolute best hiding place.

And for anyone here, if you're feeling bruised by life, if you feel whatever, I mean, so many of you have had so many difficult things to deal with, so many things that are hard.

[28 : 36] God just wants to take you and hold you so that you can hide in his arms forever. And you know, when we do that, when we have that, it means that we can actually go out into this week and face what the world will bring us.

In fact, verse eight speaks about that. God is the one who instructs us, teaches us, guides us. And with that, with that help, we can step forward into Monday tomorrow and into the rest of the week. With God, you don't need to hide anything. And with God, you finally have somewhere you can hide forever.

The last thing we need to say is this. How is all that possible? You think about David's sin and all the disaster that it caused, and yet he's forgiven.

You think about our own sin and failings and the fact that Jesus has come to forgive us. How is it that God can do that? How can God be a hiding place for David and for you and for me and for everybody else who has stuffed up?

[29 : 54] Well, I know that you know the answer. The answer is that it's because of Jesus. It's because Jesus died on the cross for our sins.

It's because Jesus rose again and has conquered the power of sin and death. It's all because of what Jesus has done.

But can you remember what happened in the Garden of Gethsemane as Jesus approached the cross? It's recorded for us in Mark 14.

They went to a place called Gethsemane and he said to his disciples, sit here while I pray. And he took with him Peter and James and John and began to be greatly distressed and troubled.

And he said to them, my soul is very sorrowful even to death. Remain here and watch. And going a little further, he fell on the ground and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.

[30 : 58] At that moment, described there in verse 35, when Jesus fell and prayed, what did he want to do?

He wanted to hide. He wanted this to stop. He did not want to have to go a step further.

He wanted to hide. But he couldn't. And instead, he was totally exposed.

Exposed to the brutal beating of the soldiers. Exposed to all the mocking of the crowd. Exposed to the conspiracy of the religious leaders who ran a sham trial to condemn him.

Exposed to the agony of crucifixion. Exposed to the overwhelming wrath of God as he was offered for our sins.

[32 : 11] Jesus could not hide. Jesus had nowhere to hide. But he did it so that you can hide in his arms forever.

Amen. Won't he just pray?