

CONNECT

Psalm 32:1-7 further defines the blessed person. Read these verses and connect them to your own life by answering the following questions.

1. The world places a high commodity on being strong, not showing weakness, and always being right. How much does this mind-set affect your personal and professional life? How can you identify with the psalmist in verses 3-4?
2. Verse 1 says that the truly blessed person is one who has experienced the forgiveness of sins through Christ's death on the cross. Look back to your answer for question 2 in the "Focus" section. How does this basic principle affect your own view of blessedness?
3. How have you experienced the blessing of God being your shelter during a crisis of "rising waters" (v. 6)?

VISION

At dinner this week, light a candle and make sure a saltshaker is on the table. Let these be a reminder to you and your family that God has blessed you through Jesus, and that Jesus is now sending you out as seasoning and light into a tasteless, dark world. In your prayers, ask the Lord for faith to see yourself as completely blessed and for wisdom in how to bring glory to God through blessed acts.

Session 2

HEY DIDDLE, DIDDLE; EVERY JOT AND TITTLE!

FOCUS

Have you seen those mazes on TV that Midwestern farmers have created in the midst of their huge cornfields? I had always been skeptical about the difficulty of these mazes and wondered if they offered any entertainment value whatsoever. I doubted so . . . until I tried one myself. The first large maze I lost myself in (literally!) was not in the Midwest, but in Hawaii. I participated in the maze created by the Dole Plantation, which, as you can probably guess, is in the shape of a pineapple.

The task was simple enough: we had to find six stations within the maze. At each station was a stencil of a picture, which we were to trace on our official entry form. The quickest time of the day would win some prize provided by Dole. My theory was that your love of pineapple juice directly corresponded to how eager you were to set the fastest time of the day. Since I think pineapples are an acquired taste, I was happy enough to try to come out somewhere in the middle of the pack.

The first two stations were simple enough. Even by silly luck, one could find a station merely by listening to the yells of the children and teenagers who had gone before you. Finding the rest of the stations, however, took more discipline. Though I firmly believed my superior use of reasoning and direction would whisk me through the maze in short order, I was soon humbled to learn that I wasn't any different from the others running in circles within the maze. I experienced wrong turns, paths that looked vaguely familiar, and complete loss of perspective. (In retrospect, I should have used the ET, Reese's Pieces method!) I finally made it out of the maze some 45 minutes later—a full 27 minutes behind the best time of the day—fully frustrated.

Life can be similar to a maze, can't it? Do you ever feel like you're not making any progress? Is your life fraught with a number of wrong turns? Is it easy to lose your perspective? Describe a time in your life when you felt like you were lost in a maze, and share it with the rest of the group.

INFORM

By the time Jesus started His public ministry, the religious elite of Judaism, many generations of scholars, had produced an extensive code of ethics and laws. What had started out as the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai was now an elaborate system of what to do and what not to do to be truly faithful. It was like being caught in a legal maze, and most people were constantly afraid of making a wrong turn.

This type of codification of God's Law often led to hypocrisy and shallow ritualism. (Jesus points this out on numerous occasions in the Gospels.) In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches a true interpretation of God's will for our lives. Read Matthew 5:17-20 and see how He introduces this topic.

1. What does Jesus say about the endurance of God's Law (v. 18)?

2. What does Jesus say about the severity of breaking God's Law (v. 19)?

3. What kind of hope does He give the average Israelite in regard to the person's own righteousness (v. 20)?

4. When it comes to the Law, what is Jesus' mission on our behalf (v. 17)?

CONNECT

1. Do you often have a guilty conscience? Are you constantly aware of your failure to fulfill God's Law? Where would you place yourself on the scale below?

constantly aware of my guilt

never feel regret

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Read John 19:16-22, 28-30.

2. Jesus is the One who has fulfilled the Law for us. He is the One whose righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees! Through faith, Christ's righteousness completely covers you, and you are seen as holy in the Father's eyes. How easy or difficult is it for you to accept yourself as God accepts you?

VISION

The lyrics of the song "In the Light" go like this:

I keep trying to find a life
On my own, apart from you.
I am the king of excuses.
I've got one for every selfish thing I do.
Chorus:
What's going on inside of me?
I despise my own behavior.
This only serves to confirm my suspicions
That I'm still a man in need of a Savior.

(Charlie Peacock, "In the Light." On the compact disc *Jesus Freak*. Performed by dc Talk. Additional lyrics by Toby McKeehan.)

Learn to seek Christ's righteousness. Through Him you are made right with God and will be empowered to better live out that righteousness in your life. In your prayers this week, include this petition: "Lord Jesus, I thank You for fulfilling all righteousness for me on the cross and for making me holy. By Your Holy Spirit, may I live a life that mirrors Your righteous life."