

God's Conviction

BELIEVERS SHOULD REPENT AND CONFESS THEIR SINS TO GOD KNOWING THAT HE WILL NOT ABANDON THEM.
PSALM 38:1-8,18-22

HOW DIFFICULT IS IT FOR YOU TO ASK SOMEONE FOR FORGIVENESS? DOES IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE IF YOU KNOW THAT THE ONE YOU WRONGED LOVES YOU UNCONDITIONALLY?

One of the most difficult things to do is asking for someone's forgiveness. To do so means we must assume responsibility for our actions. It means owning the truth and admitting to others we have done wrong. Also, when we have sinned against someone and ask for their forgiveness, there is no guarantee they will. We do not have to worry about this concerning God. When we repent and confess our sins to God, we can know He will forgive us.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Psalm 38 is a penitential psalm. Penitential psalms are expressions of contrition and repentance in which the psalmist pleads to be restored to a right relationship with God. This psalm recalls a time in David's life when he suffered because of his sin. The occasion or sin that precipitated the psalm is unknown, but the superscription of the psalm indicates it is a psalm "to bring remembrance." It may have been written as a call for God to remember what was happening, or for David to remember what happened. In the Old Testament, to ask God to "remember" meant asking Him to act concerning the matter or person He is asked to remember. This fits the contents of this psalm. On the other hand, perhaps David wrote it so that he could remember the lesson he learned from the experience of his sin, its consequences, and God's forgiveness-and so he could instruct and encourage others by it as well.

Psalm 38 is a lament that touches on the themes of divine discipline, suffering, sin, guilt, confession and hope in God's salvation. The psalm demonstrates how believers should view their sin. David recognized the seriousness of his sin (v. 4). This reminds believers that we should not take sin and its consequences lightly. Our loving heavenly Father will discipline us for our good, even though experiencing His discipline can be very difficult. God disciplines His children to keep them from harm and to help them grow into the image of Christ.

Psalm 38 should remind us that God's relationship to His children is both personal and powerful, as He answers our prayers and saves us in times of need. Therefore, we must refuse to conceal our sin. Instead, we need to keep short accounts with God by repenting and confessing our sins to Him as soon as possible, knowing that He is ready to hear our prayers and to forgive our sins.

Key Words

- 1 LORD, do not **punish me** A in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. 2 For **your arrows** B have sunk into me, and your hand has pressed down on me. 3 There is **no soundness** C in my body because of your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin. 4 For my **iniquities have flooded** D over my head; they are a burden too heavy for me to bear. 5 My wounds are **foul and festering** E because of my foolishness. 6 I am bent over and brought very low; all day long I go around in mourning. 7 For my insides are full of burning pain, and there is no soundness in my body. 8 I am **faint** F and severely crushed; I groan because of the anguish of my heart. (...)
- **18** So I confess my iniquity; I am anxious because of my sin. **19** But my enemies are vigorous and powerful; many hate me for no reason. **20** Those who **repay evil for good** ^G attack me for pursuing good. **21** LORD, do not abandon me; my God, do not be far from me. **22** Hurry to help me, my Lord, my salvation.

- **A.** Suffering does not always derive from sin, but David clearly connected the two here. This was punishment and "discipline" from the Lord.
- **B.** The anger of God was so fierce that David felt like he had a target on his back. God's arrows went straight into his being.
- C. "No health" (NIV). The Hebrew term can mean "safety" or "peace." But here it suggests a physical weakness. Not all sickness is the result of sin, but David recognized the impact of God's "indignation" on his physical well-being.
- **D.** David had lost control of the situation and was "drowning" in the mess his sin had created.
- E. The combination of the Hebrew words suggest the odor caused by decay. David could not live with the putrid festering that characterized his life and separated him from God.
- **F.** "Feeble" (KJV; NIV; ESV). The Hebrew also can be rendered "numb." Sin promises pleasure, but, as David discovered, it only brings pain and robs us of our vitality.
- **G.** His change of heart only intensified the opposition of David's enemies. They apparently stepped up their attacks against him.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Conviction

(Psalm 38:1-4)

The Holy Spirit convicts us so that we will recognize and turn from our sin.

- How might God convict us of our sin?
- What are the benefits of the Holy Spirit's conviction?

2. Anguish

(Psalm 38:5-8)

We can expect conviction of sin to create a range of emotions in us, including guilt and sorrow.

 Why might people underestimate or dismiss the consequences of sin?

3. Confession

(Psalm 38:18-22)

When we experience conviction, we should respond by confessing our sins to God and seeking His forgiveness.

- What does it mean to confess our iniquity?
- What obstacles might keep us from confessing our sins to God?

Apply the Text

As a group, discuss the danger and consequences of not confessing sin to God.

KEY DOCTRINE:

God's Purpose of Grace

Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. (See John 5:24; Romans 8:29-30.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Use a Bible dictionary to learn more about the biblical concept of salvation.

David's affirmation of God as his Savior opens the door for further study into the doctrine of salvation. In the Old Testament perspective of salvation, deliverance and victory come into view. The New Testament provides the complete picture of eternal salvation through Jesus Christ. Read the article on salvation in a Bible dictionary. What insights do you learn to help you to appreciate David's affirmation? In what ways can you affirm Jesus to be your salvation?

TALK IT OUT

Focus on Psalm 38:21-22. What is our natural reaction when we sin? What should we do instead?

Psalm 38 is a psalm of David that describes the anguish he felt over his sin. He was in deep sorrow and physical distress as a result of his guilt. As a result of his sin, David's close walk with the Lord was broken. This psalm reveals what conviction of sin can feel like as well as how we should respond to God.

Looking over Psalm 38, what words describe the conviction of sin that David felt?

Psalm 38:21-22 is the psalmist's cry for God not to abandon him. Our human thinking is that our sin drives God away from us. In reality, it's our sin and need of a Savior that brought Jesus to us. Remember that "God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). While we may feel God abandons us when we sin, He wants to restore our fellowship with Him. We need to take the steps of confession and repentance to enjoy fellowship with the Lord.

When have you felt the Holy Spirit convict you of sin? What was your response?

Read aloud Psalm 38:21-22 several times, reading with the emotion of the verses to help lock it into memory.

Prayer Requests

DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Psalm 38:1-2

Reflect on the consequences of sin as described in these verses.

Verse 1 emphasizes the consequences of sin. David began this psalm acknowledging that the difficulties he was experiencing were from the Lord and were the result of his own sin. Whatever David's sin was, God's response to it brought about a great deal of suffering to David.

David's cry was for God to "discipline" him like a son and not treat him like an enemy. David understood the difference between the merciless judgment of God on His enemies and the loving discipline of his heavenly Father. The word's "punish" and "discipline" both denote punishment accompanied by correction and instruction.

Verse 2 describes how overwhelmingly painful and difficult it was for David to endure God's discipline. He was overcome by his sense of God's displeasure. He indicated that God's "hand" had "pressed down on" him. The hand of God is most often used figuratively to represent God's power and might. In this instance, David was describing how the might of God was pressing down on him as the Lord disciplined him. It felt like an unbearable burden. David described this feeling in Psalm 32:4, stating that the Lord's "hand was heavy on me; my strength was drained as in the summer's heat."

Has your sin ever made you feel the way David described in verse 2? How did you respond?

Day 2: Psalm 38:3-4

Contemplate the link between one's spiritual condition and physical condition.

David's statements indicate he was physically afflicted throughout his entire body, and it was because of the Lord's "indignation." This word in Hebrew has the sense of "boiling up." It carries with it the idea that God had reached His boiling point with David. David understood the reason for this; it was because of his sin.

David recognized the interconnectedness of one's spiritual condition with one's physical condition. Not every physical problem happens as a direct result of a specific, personal sin. Our bodies are decaying and dying as a result of the fall in Genesis 3. As descendants of Adam and Eve, we inherited a sin nature, and the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Unless the Lord returns first, we are all going to die. Nevertheless, penitential psalms often highlight the relationship between physical and spiritual suffering. David's admissions about his physical and spiritual condition should remind us that sin not only has devastating spiritual consequences, it also impacts our physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

In verse 4, David described his iniquities as like a flood drowning him. He felt overwhelmed by his sins and the severity of God's discipline. He exclaimed that his sins and God's discipline on him for his sins were a burden "too heavy" for him to bear.

How is the Holy Spirit's conviction a demonstration of God's grace?

Day 3: Psalm 38:5

Circle the word "foolishness."

David continued to picture how his sin caused him anguish. Some believe David was metaphorically describing his pain, while others believe he was speaking of actual wounds. Either is possible. What is unmistakable is that his suffering was real. Describing his wounds as "foul" means they were repulsive, giving off a repugnant odor. Then he indicated his wounds were "festering," meaning they were discharging infectious fluid.

What is also clear is the cause of this suffering: David's "foolishness." David saw sin for what it truly is—foolishness. Several times in the Old Testament, acting foolishly and sinning are equated with one another (Num. 12:11; 1 Chron. 21:8; Ps. 107:17).

In Mark 7:21-22, Jesus included "foolishness" in a list of several sins which included sexual immoralities, thefts, murders, adulteries, greed, and evil actions. Jesus put foolishness on the same level as these other sins and put it last in His list as an expression that aptly describes all sin.

David recognized the foolishness of abandoning the way of faithful obedience to God and allowing sin to reign in his heart. This recognition and confession are essential steps toward reconciliation with God.

Explain why sin is "foolishness."

Pray that you would see your own sin for what it truly is.

Day 4: Psalm 38:6-8

Underline all the words that describe David's condition.

David indicated he was "bent over and brought very low." This is the picture of unrelenting pain that robbed him of his vitality and strength. It is a heart-wrenching description of how miserable David had become as a result of his sin and God's discipline.

David indicated that he continually spent his days "in mourning." Mourning is an expression of bereavement over a serious loss. What did David lose as a result of his sin? He did not lose his salvation or his relationship with the Lord. Throughout Psalm 38, David called out to God as his Lord. Also, the Bible teaches that when believers sin, God disciplines them, and this is a sign that they are His children. Even though believers are secure in their salvation, there is always loss when we sin. For instance, there will be a strain in our fellowship with God and perhaps a feeling of alienation from God when we sin. There may be lost opportunities to serve the Lord, lost blessings, lost peace of mind, or the loss of physical health and vitality like David described in this psalm. Be sure that there are always consequences to our sin, even if we are believers.

David accentuated how he was miserably affected by his sin and God's discipline. He felt weak and crushed. The only thing left for him to do was groan in response to the anguish of his heart.

Pray by name for a believer who is struggling with sin.

Day 5: Psalm 38:18-22

Compare Psalm 38:18-22 to Psalm 32:5.

David knew that instead of excusing his sin, ignoring his sin, or living in continued anxiety because of it, what he needed to do was confess his sin to God.

As a result of David's sin, he was spiritually, emotionally, and physically debilitated. In contrast, his enemies were "vigorous and powerful." Why did David's enemies hate him? It was his "pursuing good" that caused them to hate him. They were not only enemies of David but also the enemies of God. They represented what the New Testament calls "the world"—enemies of God who are under the devil's influence, pursuing ideals, morals, and purposes that are in opposition to the Lord and His Church.

Given David's condition, what hope was there for him to survive, much less to stand up to these enemies and defeat them? His hope was in the Lord. David knew that God is faithful to show mercy to His children when they confess and repent of their sin. Likewise, David knew that the Lord never abandons or forsakes His children (Ps. 37:28). Consequently, he trusted in his God and cried out to the Lord to "hurry to help" him and save him.

Ask God to help you examine your life for sinful habits and practices. Seek His forgiveness and thank Him for never abandoning you.

