

God's Conviction

SESSION 9

Psalm 38:1-8,18-22

Memory Verse: Psalm 38:21-22

Believers should repent and confess their sins to God knowing that He will not abandon them.

In a courtroom, a conviction leads to a sentence. When someone is convicted of a crime, the judge determines the penalty. The greater the crime, the worse the penalty. After the judge determines the penalty, everyone leaves the courtroom, and the convicted criminal goes to jail.

In a relationship with God, conviction has the hope of a completely different outcome. Conviction of sin can lead to repentance and forgiveness, which actually provides freedom from bondage. Just as breathtaking, it can open the door to renewed intimacy with God.

As you prepare to lead this study from Psalm 38, ask God to convict you of unconfessed sin in your life. Pray that He will begin a new, reviving work in the adults of your Bible study group.



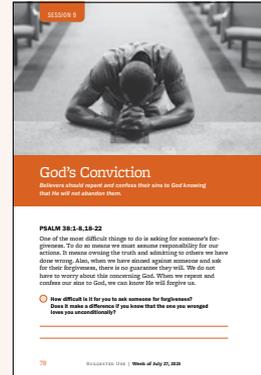
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One of the most difficult things to do is asking for someone’s forgiveness. To do so means we must assume responsibility for our actions. It means owning the truth and admitting to others we have done wrong. Also, when we have sinned against someone 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. (PSG, p. 78)

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?



Understand the Context (Psalm 38)

By placing psalms into various categories, Bible students can better understand a particular psalm’s purpose. Psalm 38 is an example of a penitential psalm because it expresses the writer’s genuine repentance and sincere sorrow over sinful behavior.

According to the information provided in the introduction, David wrote Psalm 38 in a quest to remember. For that reason, it may have been used with memorial offerings that God instructed His people to bring when they worshiped Him (Lev. 2:2; 24:7). At the same time, it also nurtured personal worship, fostering an awareness of sin against God and the need to repent.

The psalm does mention physical illness, but David was not implying that sin caused all sickness. However, in this context, he acknowledged that the sickness described resulted from his sin. His physical malady opened his eyes to his spiritual problem, and he repented.

Psalm 37 played a role in establishing this context for Psalm 38. It’s a psalm about trusting the Lord during the long days of difficulty. In Psalm 38, David wrote about the difficulty he faced as he struggled with a serious setback in his health. He saw that his physical ailments had been rooted in a spiritual problem. He remembered his sinful behavior, and he confessed it to the Lord.

David began this psalm of remembrance by asking the Lord to have mercy on him (38:1-3). From there, he described his malady, as well as the physical and spiritual pain that he had been enduring as a result (38:4-10).

The painful struggle with his deteriorating physical health had been made worse by the treatment he received from troublesome people in his life. As he suffered, his friends turned their backs on him, as did his neighbors. At the same time, his enemies made their plans to take advantage of his weakened condition. In the face of such a threatening situation, he found himself unable to hear what they were plotting. Consequently, he didn’t know what to say in response.

Fortunately, he did not blame the Lord for his predicament. Instead, he made a wise decision to turn to God for help. As he prayed, he asked for protection against the efforts of his enemies who rejoiced over his suffering (38:11-15).

As he continued to pray, he gave attention to his spiritual need instead of his physical agony. Sin had caused his sickness. Therefore, his spiritual health needed to be restored as his first priority. Just as distressing, his enemies seemed to be healthy and ambitious, ready to bring harm to him even though he had tried to do what’s right. He asked the Lord to save him (38:16-22).

As you read Psalm 38:1-8, 18-22, identify the consequences of sin. Identify also the assurances of faith expressed by the psalmist. (PSG, p. 79)



PREPARE: Make copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Psalms*), **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Organizing the Psalms*), and **Pack Item 14** (*Handout: Our Forgiving God*).

DISCUSS: Show adults pictures of several emojis. Talk about some that might be confusing or easily misunderstood. Briefly discuss the messages various emojis convey.

ASK: **When have you sent a message or said something that was misunderstood by someone? How did you fix that situation?**

STATE: *Sometimes we send a message or take an action that hurts others. Sometimes we're on the other end of a hurtful message or action. Actions and words often lead to broken relationships.*

GUIDE: Direct a volunteer to read aloud the introductory paragraph on page 78 of the PSG.

ASK: **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? (PSG, p. 78)**

REVIEW: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Organizing the Psalms*) and draw attention to the “Penitential” category. Note that it is all about confession and finding forgiveness. Point out that Psalm 38 is one of these psalms—and the focus of this session.

TRANSITION: *In today's session, we'll see the importance of confession and repentance, as well as remembering that God's love never fails—even when we do.*



Group Activity Option

Music

Secure a copy of the lyrics or a recording of “Forgiveness” by Toby McKeehan, David Arthur Garcia, and Lecrae. Be prepared to distribute a copy of the lyrics to the group. Highlight the lyrics beginning with “Cause we all make mistakes sometimes.” Read the lyrics or listen to the recording. Encourage the group to join in repeating the final stanza, “We all need forgiveness.”

Conviction (Ps. 38:1-4)

1 LORD, do not punish me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. **2** For your arrows have sunk into me, and your hand has pressed down on me. **3** There is no soundness in my body because of your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin. **4** For my iniquities have flooded over my head; they are a burden too heavy for me to bear.

(v. 1) Punish: David used the revered name for God (*Yahweh*) to convey the utmost respect and reverence to the God who had the sovereign right and authority to **punish** him for his sins. The wording is parallel poetry aligned with **discipline** later in the verse. It also suggests being validated or having an argument proven right, especially in a legal setting. David knew that he would come up on the losing end of any courtroom debate with God over his sin. He would be found guilty and face the consequences of his crimes.

(v. 1) Your anger . . . your wrath: This also reflects the poetic parallelism in verse 1. David's urgent appeal had stemmed from the agony that he endured because of God's rebuke. He begged God to refrain from letting His **anger** bring more punishment. Jeremiah made a similar appeal when he asked God to withhold His anger against the residents of Judah (Jer. 10:24). God's **wrath** did not result from losing His temper. Instead, it was rooted in His perfect wisdom in disciplining His people as He attempted to lead them back toward Him.

(v. 2) Your arrows . . . your hand: Figurative language helped David to describe the painful effect of God's discipline on him. Comparing God's discipline to **arrows** also helped Job as he tried to bear witness to the intense agony that he experienced during his painful physical ordeal (Job 6:4). God's people on their way to Babylonian exile described their travail using the same picture word (Lam. 3:12-13). Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, shared her sorrow over losing her husband by saying that God had turned His **hand** against her (Ruth 1:13).

(v. 3) No soundness . . . no health: In verse 3, David began to identify the link between his misery and his sin. He believed that his lack of **soundness** resulted from His disobedience to God. Therefore, he considered his physical crisis to be evidence of God's scorn. His entire body ached, and his torment reminded him that God

held him accountable for his foolish choices. As long as he harbored rebellion against God, David would never be able to experience genuine **health** in his body.

Key Concept

Sickness and Sin

In Psalm 38, David linked his physical malady and his spiritual malady. He was suffering because of **my sin** (v. 3). Yet, he was not suggesting that all sickness emanated from sin. The entirety of the Bible also bears this out. For example, Job's suffering had no connection with any judgment of sin on God's part. Even while his friends tried to convince him to come clean before God (Job 4:7-9), Job affirmed his integrity (31:5-6).

Likewise, when Jesus's disciples asked whose sin caused a man to be born blind (John 9:1-2), Jesus corrected their faulty theology. He emphasized that the man's condition was not the result of anyone's sin. Rather, it set the context for God to receive great glory (9:3).

(v. 4) My iniquities: Turning to another word picture, David compared the overwhelming agony of his **iniquities** to drowning in the rising water of a menacing flood. The Hebrew word (*awon*) conveys the idea of wickedness for which a person would be held accountable before God. Ezra also spoke of the staggering effect of God's accountability on a person's body (Ezra 9:6).

(v. 4) A burden too heavy: Using yet another mental image, David compared his spiritual and physical misery to a **burden too heavy . . . to bear**. It weighed him down to the point he could not discard it or escape from it. Nehemiah used a similar word to describe the excessive tax burden that previous governors placed on the Jews when they returned to Jerusalem (Neh. 5:15-18).

EXPLORE Psalm 38:1-4

1



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

READ: Invite a volunteer to read **Psalm 38:1-4** as the group listens for how David described his suffering before the Lord.

SHARE: Using Understand the Context (PSG, p. 79), provide background information on Psalm 38. Highlight that while the sin that led to the psalm is unidentified, David knew it had caused problems.

RECAP: To highlight the connection between sin and physical illness, summarize this content from page 81 of the PSG: “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.”

ASK: **How might God convict us of our sin? What are the benefits of the Holy Spirit’s conviction?** (PSG, p. 81)

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Stone

Distribute a small piece of gravel or stone to each person. Guide the group to visualize the effect of putting the stone in their shoe and walking. Ask: *How would it feel? Would you stop and try to remove it?* Explain that sin is like the gravel in our shoe. Say: *Even if it seems small, it constantly grates and causes pain.* As time allows, walk the group through the Plan of Salvation on the inside front cover of the PSG. Let them know that you are available to speak with anyone who is struggling with sin or considering God’s offer of salvation through Jesus.

Anguish (Ps. 38:5-8)

5 My wounds are foul and festering 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 and severely crushed; I groan because of the anguish of my heart.

(v. 5) My wounds: It's possible that David was speaking metaphorically, but it's just as likely that he was describing the effects of an actual illness. If so, his sickness brought on intense pain. A **foul** odor also emanated from his **wounds**, suggesting that his condition was getting worse. The putrid smell sent the heartbreaking reminder that David's body would waste away unless he confronted his sin.

(v. 5) My foolishness: Speculation regarding the exact diagnosis of David's physical problem serves as a useless distraction from what really mattered. Naming his medical problem does not matter as much as recognizing the need to be honest about our own spiritual condition. Because his misery resulted from sinful behavior, David turned his attention to the sin that caused it. He regarded what he had done as **foolishness**.

In truth, he didn't need medicine for his body nearly as much as he needed a remedy for his aching soul. What was true for David could be said for all of us as well. We all fall into **foolishness** at times and need to seek God for a way out.

(v. 6) Bent over . . . brought very low: David's inability to stand upright indicated that his medical problem had become severe. Others faced the same problem, but perhaps for different reasons. Solomon wrote that as people grew older, the changes in their bodies left them stooping instead of standing up straight (Eccl. 12:3). Jesus encountered a woman who had been sick and **bent over** for eighteen years. When Jesus saw her, he liberated her from her disability (Luke 13:11-12). Unable to stand up straight, David encountered a disturbing reality. His dire situation did not appear to be hopeful at all.

(v. 6) I go around in mourning: His seemingly hopeless outcome had an effect on him emotionally. Not only did he suffer physical pain, but he also grieved what had become of him.

To make his situation even worse, his sorrow never abated. His mourning lasted **all day long**. Within the context of God's discipline, David's sorrow would prove to have a beneficial impact on him. Jesus later assured His disciples that mourning in the context of spiritual discipline would give way to comfort (Matt. 5:4).

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.)

(v. 7) My insides: David's pain didn't stop with his festering skin or his bent posture. He also pointed to agony caused by an internal problem. The Hebrew word for **insides** (*kesel*) could have referred to the effects of a fever, or he may have been struggling with an internal malady that had left him "in flames" (CEV). The constant pain that came from everywhere in his body plagued him with endless misery.

(v. 8) Anguish of my heart: David confessed that he was **severely crushed**. What was happening to him physically paled in comparison to what he was enduring spiritually. The awful impact of his sin had sapped his strength and worn him out.

However, the **anguish** in his heart didn't arise primarily from his physical condition. It arose from the spiritual sickness that existed in his heart. Along with longing for his body to be healed, he yearned even more for the recovery of his spiritual health.

EXPLORE Psalm 38:5-8



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

READ: Direct the group to read silently Psalm 38:5-8, noting the depth of David's despair.

RECORD: Encourage the group to list the various physical ailments David experienced from the verses. Write their responses on the board. Use information from page 96 of the Leader Guide to expand on what some of these terms might mean. Write the word *foolishness* on the board. Share that David identified this as the root of his problems.

RECAP: Share the following content from page 82 of the PSG: *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 wisely 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.*

ASK: Why might people underestimate or dismiss the consequences of sin? (PSG, p. 83)

TRANSITION: *David understood that his condition was the result of his disobedience. He also knew the path back to God and to healing for his body and his spirit.*

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Paraphrase

Give each adult a sheet of paper and a pencil. Encourage the group to imagine they are in the same type of situation as David. Direct them to write a paraphrase of Psalm 38:5-8. Lead the group to reflect on how sin affects both the person and their relationships.

Confession (Ps. 38:18-22)

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 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.

(v. 18) I confess: David knew that something had to be done about his sin, but he had no way of taking it away himself. So, he opened his heart to God. According to Proverbs 28:13, hiding sin is never productive, but confessing sin leads to God's mercy. David's prayer reflected the only productive decision for anyone **anxious** about sin.

(v. 19) My enemies: As David dealt with his spiritual and physical pain, he brought up another issue that concerned him. He looked beyond his own condition and observed his **enemies**. They were **vigorous and powerful**. While they had no justification for their animosity, they had grown into a stronger threat to him and his kingdom.

(v. 20) Repay evil for good attack me: David disclosed the evil intentions of his enemies. They opposed him because he was pursuing **good**. This reason for their **attack** made it even more disgraceful. Jeremiah had to deal with a similar response because he preached God's Word faithfully (Jer. 18:20). Peter urged his readers to expect mistreatment by their enemies (1 Pet. 4:14-16).

(v. 21) LORD: As David prayed, he called out to God using three different names for Him. First, he called out to the **LORD (Yahweh)**, God's most sacred name. The name served to remind God's people that He had no beginning and no end and that He brought everything in the universe into being. This name also assured them that He would never **abandon** them (Deut. 31:6). For David, God's presence in his life mattered more than even the restoration of his health.

(v. 21) My God: The second name for God David used comes from the Hebrew word *Elohim*. This title can be traced all the way back to creation (Gen. 1:1ff). It also was used in the conversation between God and Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:1-15). That name emphasized the greatness of God and the power He exerted on behalf of His people. Such a precious name rendered honor

to God for everything He had done. Accordingly, David used it to beg God to **not be far** from him.

(v. 22) My Lord: The third name for God (*adonay*) highlights the majesty and sovereign authority of the **Lord**. This title is distinct from the small caps translation that renders *Yahweh*, but it was just as meaningful, as David cried out for **help**.

In his heart, David believed that he could still call on God to be his **salvation**. He counted on God's grace and humbled himself before the sovereign God who ruled with complete authority. God alone would be the One who would deliver him and grant him forgiveness and victory.

Praying Scripture

Psalm 38:21-22

Spend time praying Scripture using Psalm 38:21-22. Read the verses, then respond to these questions:

- How does God reveal Himself in these verses?
- How should I respond to what He reveals?

Example: Ask God to help you examine your life for sinful habits and practices that are tearing you down. Seek His forgiveness and thank Him for never abandoning you.

During the session, invite adults to pray this Scripture, as well. You and the adults in your group can also take advantage of the Explore the Bible Prayer Guide. This QR code also appears on page 68 of the *Personal Study Guide*.



Explore the Bible Prayer Guide

Scan here for a weekly prayer guide based on this quarter's Bible passages.

EXPLORE Psalm 38:18-22



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

READ: Invite a volunteer to read **Psalm 38:18-22** as the group listens for the first verb.

ASK: What does it mean to confess our iniquity?

RECAP: To emphasize the meaning and significance of confession, share the following from page 84 of the PSG: *David knew the Lord and trusted in Him. Therefore, he 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, trusting that the Lord would be faithful to forgive him (see 1 John 1:9).*

RESPOND: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 14** (*Handout: Our Forgiving God*). Give adults a few minutes to review the handout. Then allow a few volunteers to share things that stick out to them from the article. Highlight the importance of remembering that God is eager and able to forgive our sins.

ASK: What obstacles might keep us from confessing our sins to God? (PSG, p. 85)

PRAY: Provide copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Psalms*). Lead adults to take a few minutes to follow the “Praying Scripture” prompts on page 98 of the Leader Guide.



NOTES

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Guide the group to work in teams of three or four and complete the Bible Skill activity on page 85 of the PSG. Provide copies of a Bible dictionary to each team. Suggest one member of the team read the article on salvation before the group answers the questions. After a few minutes, review the questions and allow time for volunteers to share their responses.

CHALLENGE

- SUMMARIZE:** Review these points from Apply the Text on page 86 of the *Personal Study Guide*:
- *The Holy Spirit convicts us so that we will recognize and turn from our sin.*
 - *We can expect conviction of sin to create a range of emotions in us, including guilt and sorrow.*
 - *When we experience conviction, we should respond by confessing our sins to God and seeking His forgiveness.*
- SHARE:** Direct attention to the inside cover of the PSG. Lead the group to examine God's plan for each person. Note that for believers, salvation is secure but unconfessed sin can still hinder their relationship with Christ. Let the group know that if anyone does not have a personal relationship with Jesus, you are available to talk with them after Bible study or during the week.
- DISCUSS:** Review the second set of questions on page 86 of the PSG. Lead a brief discussion on ways believers experience conviction and how they should respond to His leading.
- PRAY:** Encourage adults to use **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Psalms*) to reflect on and memorize Psalm 38:21-22 during the week. Close the session in prayer, asking God to help adults acknowledge and confess their sins to Him.

After the Session

Set up a time to meet with individuals who respond to your invitation to talk more about their relationship with Jesus. Be prepared to follow up on the session by sharing your own testimony through a text or email to the entire group. Remind them again that you are willing to speak with anyone who is wrestling with questions about salvation, confession, and faith.

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