



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

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.



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

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.

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

EXPLORE THE TEXT

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.

VERSE 1

Verse 1 emphasizes the devastating 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. Nowhere in the psalm is there an indication of what David's sin was. Whatever David's sin was, God's response to it brought about a great deal of suffering to David.

In the Old Testament, the Lord's *anger* and *wrath* usually speak of His righteous judgment against His enemies. 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

Verse 2 metaphorically 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. In Psalm 18:14, David praised the Lord for having "shot his arrows" as God defeated David's enemies. Now David described the Lord's discipline as arrows that have sunk into him. David used language similar to Job's when Job described his suffering: "Surely the arrows of the Almighty have pierced me" (Job 6:4). However, unlike Job, David knew he deserved what was happening to him.

David 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."


VERSES 3-4

David’s statements, *there is no soundness in my body* and *there is no health in my bones*, indicate he was physically afflicted throughout his entire body. David provided two reasons for this. First, he was infirmed 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*.

Sin not only has devastating spiritual consequences, it also impacts our physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

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 continued describing his suffering on account of his sin and God’s discipline. First, he described his *iniquities* as being like a flood drowning him. David felt overwhelmed by his sins as well as by the severity of God’s discipline. Second, David metaphorically exclaimed that his sins and God’s discipline on him for his sins were a burden *too heavy* for him *to bear*.

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

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.**

VERSE 5

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.

VERSE 6

David indicated he was **bent over** and **brought very low**. These two expressions have two distinct nuances that complement one another in Hebrew. *Bent over* refers to David's writhing reaction to his incessant pain. *Brought very low* describes a weakened, sickened condition as he was physically wasting away. It 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.

Finally, 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. It is an expression of His love for them (Deut. 8:5; Prov. 3:11-12; Heb. 12:5-8). In 2 Timothy 2:13, Paul wrote, “If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.”

***Even though believers are secure in their salvation,
there is always loss when we sin.***

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.

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.)

VERSES 7-8

Continuing his portrayal of his situation, David described how he experienced a ***burning pain*** in his gut as a result of his distress. Then he repeated his statement from verse 3, accentuating how he was miserably affected by his sin and God’s discipline. Consequently, he felt weak and crushed. The only thing left for him to do was groan in response to the anguish of his heart.

 **Why might people underestimate or dismiss the consequences of sin?**

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.**

VERSE 18

David knew the truth that would later be written in Proverbs 28:13: “The one who conceals his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them will find mercy.” In a similar confession of sin to God in Psalm 32:5, David wrote, “Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not conceal my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgression to the LORD,’ and you forgave the guilt of my sin.” 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).

***God is faithful to show mercy to His children
when they confess and repent of their sin.***

VERSES 19-20

David pointed out a deep contrast between his condition and the condition of his **enemies**. As a result of his sin, David was spiritually, emotionally, and physically debilitated. In contrast, his enemies were **vigorous and powerful**. In verse 12, he indicated that they “intend to kill me . . . and want to harm me” and “threaten to destroy me.”

David indicated he had a lot of enemies. But who were they? One might think they hated David because he had personally wronged them in some way. But he had done nothing wrong to them to warrant such hatred. We could say David’s enemies had no good reason to hate him, but it was David’s **pursuing good** that caused them to hate him. Imagine David’s consternation. They were enemies of what is good and of those who did what was good. Therefore, 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 (Eph. 2:1-3; Jas. 4:4; 1 John 2:15). It is no surprise they hated David for *pursuing good*.

VERSES 21-22

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 realized he could not demand God’s mercy, but he knew that God is faithful to show mercy to His children when they confess and repent of their sin (Ps. 32:5; 86:5). Likewise, David knew that the Lord is faithful to His children, never abandoning or forsaking them (37:28). Consequently, he trusted in his God and cried out to the Lord to *hurry to help* him and save him. David prayed like this several times in his life because he had learned he could trust in the One he called *my Lord, my salvation* (see Pss. 22:19; 31:2; 40:13; 71:13).


○ What obstacles might keep us from confessing our sins to God?


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?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + 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.

 **As a group, discuss why and how God sometimes uses difficult situations to get our attention and to remind us of His faithfulness.**

 **How are you experiencing the Holy Spirit’s conviction?
How will you respond?**

 **Memorize Psalm 38:21-22.**

Prayer Needs
