

July 27, 2025

GOD'S CONVICTION: PSALM 38:1-8,18-22

Facilitator 2

Introductory Activity Option 1 (Adapted from ETB LG, 93)

Distribute the attached worksheet prior to the lesson. Ask the group to see if they can decipher the emojis to discover the common phrase.

Say: Sometimes it is hard to decipher emojis or understand the nuance of text messages. Likewise, face-to-face interactions can be misunderstood and lead to hurt feelings and broken relationships.

"Ask: When have you sent a message or said something that someone misunderstood? How did you fix that situation?

State: Sometimes we send a message or take an action that [is misunderstood and inadvertently] hurts others. Sometimes we're on the other end of a hurtful message or action. Actions and words often lead to broken relationships. [See Notes Box]

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)"

Transition: Today, we will explore Psalm 38. This is a psalm written by David. Psalm 38 can be grouped with 6 other psalms we call penitential psalms (Ps 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143). These are "psalms of confession and sorrow for sin." (Preaching, 387) Sometimes we are not sure how to communicate with the Lord, especially when we are seeking forgiveness for something we did wrong. It might feel like we are communicating in emojis. Psalm 38 helps us learn that "Believers should repent and confess their sins to God knowing that He will not abandon them." (ETB PSG, 78) The words of Psalm 38 "show us how to confess our sin. David puts into words what we are feeling and teaches us how to come to God." (Preaching, 387)

Facilitator 1

1. CONVICTION (PS. 38:1-4)

Read or have someone read Psalm 38:1-4.

Explain: Before we dive into this psalm, let's first talk about what this psalm should not do. First, we should know that this psalm should not cause us to feel shame when there is no cause for it. There is a historical account that will help us understand this. In 1633, Galileo was imprisoned for promoting the teachings of Copernicus. The scientists asserted that the Earth rotated around the sun, not the other way around. As part of his sentence, Galileo was ordered to recite the seven penitential psalms each week. This practice was

Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *Preaching the Word: Psalms Vol 1* (Preaching Vol 1)
- *Preaching the Word: Psalms Vol 2* (Preaching Vol 2)
- *Exalting Jesus in Psalms 1-50* (Exalting 1-50)
- *Exalting Jesus in Psalms 101-150* (Exalting 101-150)
- *Exalting Jesus in Psalms 119* (Exalting 119)
- *Two Horizons OT Commentary: Psalms* (Two Horizons)
- *New American Commentary: Psalms 73-150* (NAC)

TEACHER'S NOTE: Each quarter the Explore the Bible material sets aside one lesson to be specifically evangelistic. This is that lesson. I encourage you to prepare this lesson with the intention of sharing the gospel during the lesson.

"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)

meant to awaken his conscience to the reality of his guilt before God. Well, as science has proven, the 17th-century view of the cosmos was incomplete, and Galileo did not need to feel contrition for his scientific view of the cosmos. The moral of the story is that we should not let this psalm “create guilt where there is none.” (Preaching, 387) Second, we should know that this psalm does not teach that all illness is the result of sin. The Bible teaches that the universal effect of sin on the human condition results in death. Human ages and the effect of entropy on our bodies result in illness and decline. With that being said, we should explore the passage and discover what it *does* teach. Let's start by looking at how David feels.

Facilitator 2

Ask: Ask the group how they might rephrase verse 2? (If you want to be creative and have tech-savvy group members, you might ask how they could communicate this using emojis.)

Explain: You might say that David *feels* like God's punching bag (👊) or that God is using him for target practice (🎯).

Ask: Ask the group how they might rephrase verse 3? (If you want to be creative and have tech-savvy group members, you might ask how they could communicate this using emojis.)

Explain: You might say that David *feels* nauseous (🤢), weak (😞), or puny (🐻).

Ask: Let's do one more. How might the group rephrase verse 4?

Explain: You might say that David feels like he is caught in the undertow of sin (🌊). This is similar to verse 2, where he feels like he is under a ton of weight (🏋️).

We can probably all say that at some point in our lives, we have experienced one of those feelings related to sin or bad decisions. This psalm and David's journey toward repentance and wholeness can show us that we do not have to experience those feelings, and when we do, we don't have to stay there. You might have noticed that we skipped verse 1. Let's go back to it and examine the reason David has all of these feelings.

Facilitator 1

Reread verse 1 (LORD, do not punish me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath.)

Explain: The adjectives that David uses to express his understanding of God's feelings are “anger” and “wrath.” He feels like God is mad at him (😡) or is coming against him (👊). However, the verbs David uses to describe God's actions clarify what is going on. He asks the Lord not to “punish” him. In the ESV, the word is translated as “rebuke.” This is the same language used in Psalm 6, another penitential psalm. When we combine rebuke and discipline, we see that God is not angry towards David. Nor is He pouring out His wrath as it appears to David.

TEACHER'S NOTE: To help your group members you write the phrases “Instructive Discipline” and “Corrective Discipline” on the board.

Instead, God is correcting David. Josh Smith helps us understand this in his examination of the Psalm. "The Lord disciplines his children in two ways: instructive and corrective.... The instructive discipline of the Lord refers to the way God teaches us, trains us, and molds us into his image. It is the work the Lord does in our lives to grow us as disciples.... Corrective discipline is applied to us because our continued rebellion toward the Holy Spirit's conviction of sin." (Exalting, 278) In Hebrews 12, we see how God uses instructive discipline. There the writer refers to "hostility from sinners." (v. 3) He then goes on to explain that we should "endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons." (v. 7) Through instructive discipline, God molds us using the everyday sufferings in life. However, it appears that David is suffering not the instructive discipline of God but His corrective discipline. David is sinful and overcome because of his sin. Some sins do literally make us sick. Consider the effects of eating too much at the BBQ or the effects of a person overindulging in alcohol. What David is experiencing, though, is not the *natural* result of a sin. Smith again helps us here. "This kind of discipline is not just the natural consequences of sin; it is God applying discipline for our good in order to bring us back to him. It is not penal, but it is discipline." (Exalting, 278)

Facilitator 2

Discuss: Why would God discipline His children using corrective discipline?

Summarize Transition: It appears that David is facing the corrective discipline of God because he has refused to repent of, turn from, his sin. God disciplines His children as such because God desires them to live righteous, God honoring lives that reflect the nature of Christ to the world. Our Explore the Bible material sums up this passage with the application point: "The Holy Spirit convicts us so that we will recognize and turn from our sin." (ETB PSG, 86) Sometimes, we might be blind or have become immune to the sin in our lives. When that happens, the Holy Spirit will use corrective discipline to draw our attention to our wayward lifestyle.

Facilitator 1

2. ANGUISH (PSALM 38:5-8)

Read (or have someone read) Psalm 38:5-8.

Explain: In verses 1-4, we saw a spiritual pain that resulted in physical pain. In verses 5-8, we see an emotional pain. Later in the psalm, we see relational pain (vv. 11-12). But let's focus for a moment on the emotional pain.

Ask the group to discover the words David uses in this passage to describe his state. (Allow time for answers and then focus on and use the following train of thought.)

Explain: First, he says that he is "bent over and brought very low." He goes on to say, "My insides are full of burning pain, and there is no soundness

in my body.” Finally, he says that he is “faint and severely crushed.” These could be a continuing description of the physical pain David is feeling. While that might be so, we can also begin to understand David’s emotional frame of mind more fully. The words “mourning,” “anguish,” and “crushed” paint a picture of David’s feelings. When we face illness and suffer from sickness, we can begin to experience these feelings as well. However, I think David’s choice of one word in this passage helps us see that he is beginning to understand the reason for his illness, and this reason is producing these negative emotions.

Ask: What word does David use in verse 5 to describe his actions or choices? (foolishness)

Explain: David’s use of the word “foolishness” is a euphemistic way of referring to sin. He is not trying to play down the seriousness of sin, though. His choice of wording can remind us that the way of righteousness is found in the wisdom of Scripture. To live in a way opposed to Scripture is a form of foolishness or folly.

Facilitator 2

Discuss: Ask the group to define sin. (Allow time for answers.)

Explain: Daniel Doriani provides us with a little room to breathe in our search for a definition of sin. He admits that an all-encompassing definition can be elusive. In the *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, he writes, “Sin is a riddle, a mystery, a reality that eludes definition and comprehension.”¹ We can think of sin in two ways. **First, sin is a way of being.** Doriani continues, “The Bible teaches that sin involves a condition in which the heart is corrupted and inclined toward evil.”² This is the inherited sinfulness of all mankind. Every person is born with the propensity toward sin. **Second, sin is a way of acting.** Inherited sinfulness is lived out in the practice of sinful actions.

The Bible uses many terms that help us understand sin. Let’s look at the most common. The most common Hebrew term for sin (*ḥaṭṭa’t*) “means a missing of a standard, mark, or goal.”³ The standard, mark, or goal is outlined in Scripture. One might ask why the Bible is the standard for which we strive. In answer to this question, one must understand that God is not capricious. The standards in the Bible are not simply the demands of a God who wants to place a heavy burden on humans. Instead, the Bible reveals the best way to be human. The standards outlined in the Bible are the best way to be human because they reflect the righteous nature of God. The best for human lives is reflected in the negative definition of sin provided by the most common Greek word for it. The Greek word for sin (*hamartia*) signifies “offenses against laws, people, or God.”⁴ The best, most fulfilling, most healthy way to live is to practice the opposite of sin and obey laws, treat people well, and honor God with our lives. The reality of sin is that because we miss the mark by practicing sinfulness we have broken our relationship with God. As a result, we face the reality of physical death followed

TEACHER’S NOTE: This discussion of sin might seem elementary or repetitive for the small group consisting of longtime churchgoers. However, I write it thinking about the nonbelievers who should be in our groups. Sunday School small groups are meant to be places where nonbelievers begin to form friendships with Christians. It is also a place for them to begin learning the Bible and basic theology. This lesson provides the Small Group leader an opportunity to share the reality of sin and the hope of the gospel in a natural, non-accusatory manner.

If your group does not have unbelievers present, you can preface this discussion by asking the group to listen for ways they can explain sin to unbelieving friends, relatives, acquaintances, and neighbors. You can also have a conversation about the purpose of small groups mentioned above and challenge your group to become one that invites nonbelievers to join them.

¹ Daniel Doriani, “Sin,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 736.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, 737.

⁴ Ibid.

by spiritual death. This spiritual death means that sin leads to an eternity separated from God. We call that place hell. Because of sin, we are destined for a real eternity separated from God in a real place called hell.

It may come as a counterintuitive reality to realize that there is one surprisingly positive thing about sin. Doriani concludes his discussion of sin by pointing this out. He writes, "Despite all its dismal qualities, sin makes one contribution. Because God chose to redeem his people from it, sin has been the stimulus for God's demonstration of his amazing patience, grace, and love (Rom. 5:6-8; Gal. 2:17-20; 1 Tim. 1:15-17)."⁵

Guide and Review: Guide the group to the inside cover of their Personal Study Guide. Review the ABCs at the bottom of the page. Lead the group in a prayer of salvation. Encourage those who silently prayed the prayer to speak with you afterwards. Also, use this time to inform group members that they can take the Personal Study Guide with them to study, but also to use the inside cover to help them share the hope of the gospel with others.

Facilitator 1

Summarize and Transition: David was experiencing anguish over his sinful actions. He knew that the wisdom of Scripture revealed the ways of God. He wanted to follow the Lord and do the right thing. That is why he felt such intense emotions related to his sin. Our Personal Study Guide reminds us that "We can expect conviction of sin to create a range of emotions in us, including guilt and sorrow." (ETB PSG, 86) If a person feels such anguish over sin, there are two reasons why. The first reason is that God is revealing to you that you need to turn from sin and place your trust in Him. He is leading you to feel this way so that you can find salvation in Him. The second reason might be because you, like David, have placed your faith in Him, but you are living a life of sin. He wants you to turn from that sin and come back to Him and live faithfully. In the next passage, we are going to see David do that. We are also going to see him ask the Lord for help in his relationships.

3. CONFESSION (PSALM 38:18-22)

Read or have someone read Psalm 38:18-22

Explain: "At the end of Psalm 38, the discipline is working." (Exalting, 281) David has come to the point of confession. In his prayer, we can learn a few things about confession, the confessor, one to whom he is confessing.

- **Confession:** We see in verse 18 that David takes full responsibility for his sin. He confesses "my iniquity." In our world today, we encounter many excuses for sin. The old saying, "the Devil made me do it," might not be employed as much, but there are many other excuses. In his commentary on another penitential psalm, Psalm 32, Steven Lawson provides us with a poem to expose the excuses and the reality of our sin.

(Teachers, you can either read the poem or you can highlight the excusing words he uses for sin.)

Man calls it an accident;	Man calls it a fascination;	Man calls it a trifle;
God calls it an abomination.	God calls it a fatality.	God calls it a tragedy.
Man calls it a blunder;	Man calls it an infirmity;	Man calls it a mistake;
God calls it a blasphemy.	God calls it an iniquity.	God calls it madness.
Man calls it a chance;	Man calls it luxury;	Man calls it weakness;
God calls it a choice.	God calls it leprosy.	God calls it willfulness. ⁶
Man calls it an error;	Man calls it a liberty;	
God calls it an enmity.	God calls it lawlessness.	

⁵ Ibid 739.

⁶ Steven Lawson, *Psalm 1-75*, Nashville: Holman Reference, 2004, 175

David takes responsibility for his sin, calling it mine, and recognizes the gravity of sin by calling it iniquity. "Sometimes it is not a bad thing for us to think about our sins...when we treat our sins cavalierly, we presume upon the love and grace of God. We should take our sins lightly." (ETBC 91)

- **The Confessor:** In verses 19-21, David recognizes his need for the Lord. The world is too much for him to handle, and he needs the Lord. We might find it interesting that this point is made in a prayer of confession. However, it reminds us of the relationship that is broken by our sin. David's enemies are too powerful for him, and there is nothing he can do about. In order for God to step in, David needs to repair their relationship. Likewise, the world can be too much for us. Sometimes the trials of life are brought on by our sin, other times by sinful people. Either way, we need the Lord to fight on our behalf, and He will only do that when we are in right standing before Him. Confession and repentance of sin repair our relationship.
- **The One to Whom We Confess:** In verses 21-22, David refers to the Lord in four ways. First, he calls Him LORD. Here, David is referencing the personal, covenant name of the Lord. In spite of his failing, David maintains a personal relationship with the Lord. The same is true for believers today. While we do sometimes fail to live up to Scriptural standards and thereby need to repent of sin and heal our relationship, the bonds of that relationship are never truly broken. The Lord is the one who saved us by the work of Christ on the cross. Nothing we do can ever permanently sever that bond. Second, David calls out to "my God." The word David uses for God here is Elohim. "That name emphasized the greatness of God and the power He exerted on behalf of His people... Accordingly, David used it to beg God to not be far from him." (ETB LG, 98) The God who created the universe has the power to forgive your sin and to step into your situation as rescuer. Third, David calls Him "my Lord" or *Adonai*. When a follower of God used this title, the "worshiper acknowledged God's intense majesty and greatness and also the sense of belonging to this God... Adonai, thus, is the name that expresses faith, assurance, security, ready service, and thanksgiving.⁷ David was resting on the faithful assurance of God to both forgive his sin and rescue him. Fourth, David refers to God as "my salvation." God would rescue David from his sinfulness and sinful people. As followers of God, reconciled to Him through the work of Christ, we more fully experience God as our salvation. He saves us from our sin and will forgive us when we fall back into sinful patterns.

Summarize and Transition: Psalm 38 concludes David's journey from misery to confession. He admits his sin to his God and will be rewarded with a reconciled relationship. Likewise, "When we experience conviction, we should respond by confessing our sins to God and seeking His forgiveness." (ETB PSG, 86) When we come to God for the first time and admit our sin, we experience the greatness of His forgiveness. When we come to God after falling into sinful actions as a believer, we can experience His grace and mercy again. The discipline of God is meant to move us to the point that it moved David: confession and repentance.

Facilitator 2

CONCLUDE

Guide the group to page 86 of their Personal Study Guide and review the application points at the top of the page.

Challenge the group to silently consider the second question on the page ("How are you experiencing the Holy Spirit's conviction? How will you respond?") and to ask the Lord to speak to them in the coming days concerning their relationship to Him. Do they need to come to Him for forgiveness for the first time, or is there something in their life that is hindering their relationship with Him, for which they need to confess and repent?

⁷ Gerard Van Groningen, "God, Names Of," Baker *Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 885.
J Cardinell, 2025

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God's Conviction: Psalm 38:1-8,18-22

NAME THAT P R H A S E

TEACHER'S KEY



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🐱 ➡️ 🛍️ ➡️ The Cat is out of the Bag

🐣 🖐️ ➡️ 🐣 🐣 🌳 ➡️ A Bird in the Hand is worth two in the Bush

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👩 🎵 ➡️ For the Music

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