
“Grace Greater Than My Sin”

*“Do not forsake me, O LORD; O my God, do not be far from me!
Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation!” (Psalm 38:21, 22).*

Sin causes pain. Psalm 38 is an individual lament that is usually listed as one of the seven penitential psalms (Psalms 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143). In his prayer the writer was bringing before God a stricken conscience and a broken body, as he asked for forgiveness and healing. His prayer contains a graphic description of human distress that was caused by iniquity.

Although the time of the writing of this psalm is difficult to determine, the prayer may be referring to the torturous time that followed David’s sins involving Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Samuel 11). Franz Delitzsch¹ asserted that a chronological development can be seen in Psalms 6, 38, 51, and 32 regarding David’s fall and restoration. David first acknowledged to God his agony of soul and body, describing how he was wasting away mentally and physically because of what he had done (Psalms 6; 38). Later, after being rebuked by Nathan, he penitently called upon God to pardon him for his sin (Psalm 51). Finally, after receiving forgiveness, David looked back over what had happened to him and how God, in response to his repentance, had graciously removed his sin and saved his life (Psalm 32).

The writer of Psalm 38 no doubt was experiencing four types of pain. To begin with, a bodily illness was wracking his frame with deterioration and suffering (vv. 3–10). Further, he was enduring alienation, for his friends were deserting him (v. 11). Persecution from

his enemies added to his grief and created for him an even more agonizing circumstance (vv. 12, 16, 19). Finally, weighing heavily upon his mind was the guilt of sin and sorrow for breaking God’s law (v. 18). He believed that much of the hardship he was encountering was chastisement from God because of his sins. He did not reveal in His prayer what sin or sins he had committed.

When we reach a meeting place of affliction and pain because of deliberate mistakes we have made, what should we do? Will God forgive us? Yes, His grace is greater than our sin. What steps must a child of God take in order to return to the Father’s side? Three responses—three stages of repentance—are evident in the psalmist’s prayer.

The acknowledgment of sin. We must acknowledge with penitence what we have done and accept the chastisement of God. David wrote,

O LORD, rebuke me not in Your wrath,
And chasten me not in Your burning anger.
For Your arrows have sunk deep into me,
And Your hand has pressed down on me
(Psalm 38:1, 2).

David started where anyone must start in such a situation: with an acceptance of correction. This acceptance is predicated upon guilt. The sinner must reach a point where he is saying to God, “I have sinned before You, and I have seen Your chastisement and have accepted it as I turn to You in deep repentance.”

A parent may spank a child as a means of guidance; God through His great providence permits, directs, and allows the discipline of

¹Franz Delitzsch, *A Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. Francis Bolton (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., n.d.), 2:20.

His children. Discipline is a reclaiming process, a refiner's fire. When we are on the receiving end of the rod of correction, let us acknowledge what has happened to us and receive the lesson of our Father's discipline.

David detailed his pain and problems as he spoke to God:

There is no soundness in my flesh because of
Your indignation;
There is no health in my bones because of
my sin.
For my iniquities are gone over my head;
As a heavy burden they weigh too much for
me.
My wounds grow foul and fester
Because of my folly (Psalm 38:3–5).

Talking over our troubles with our heavenly Father is good for us. Relating all the struggles we are going through—those within and without—is good for us and is a meaningful way to express our repentance and our acceptance of God's correction.

At times, bringing all our problems to God (Psalm 38:9–12) is all we can do, for we are unable to unravel our messed-up lives by ourselves. All David could do was bring all His troubles to God—the whole tangled mess. He said,

Lord, all my desire is before You;
And my sighing is not hidden from You.
My heart throbs, my strength fails me;
And the light of my eyes, even that has gone
from me. . . .
For I hope in You, O Lord;
You will answer, O Lord my God (Psalm
38:9–15).

He laid everything before the gracious eyes of God. Likewise, we must tell God about our circumstances, expressing our repentance and sorrow over what we have done and accepting God's correction. These actions and attitudes comprise the response that a genuinely penitent heart makes.

The asking for forgiveness. We must ask God to supply His grace and wisdom as we cope with our predicaments.

Do not forsake me, O LORD;
O my God, do not be far from me!
Make haste to help me,
O Lord, my salvation! (Psalm 38:21, 22).

This request should be the main object of

the prayer of the broken and contrite Christian. We must never, regardless of how bad the situation, lose our faith in God. He is full of lovingkindness and will come to our help if we ask Him to do so.

John gave us the everlasting assurance of forgiveness in his words: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Later, John reminded us that, when we make a mistake, we are to turn our hearts to two truths: what Jesus did on earth and what Jesus is currently doing in heaven. He said,

My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world (1 John 2:1, 2).

Our Father, to be sure, does not want us to sin; He knows what sin does to our lives and to our relationship with Him. However, God has made provisions for those times when we do sin. He sent Jesus to die on the cross, to be the propitiation for our sins, and He has put Jesus at His right hand to be our intercessor (Romans 8:34).

John announced a condition for forgiveness with the little word "if." He said that confession is necessary: "If we confess . . ." (1 John 1:9; emphasis mine). As surely as we genuinely confess our sin, God, according to His faithfulness and unwavering justice to what is right, forgives us our sins.

The acceptance of forgiveness. God has made promises to His people; and when the conditions of His forgiveness have been met, we must affirm what God has promised. He is reliable and faithful, but we must be trusting, gratefully accepting the forgiveness that He has given.

Paul provided instruction on how to accept, affirm, and then move forward with obedience to God's will. In his presentation of these truths, he opened and closed the paragraph with an exhortation to accept what God has given us. He said,

[Accept:] Even so consider yourselves to be

dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

[*Affirm:*] Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts,
[*Move forward:*] and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.
[*Accept:*] For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace (Romans 6:11–14).

The journey to forgiveness is outlined in Psalm 38 and in the New Testament instructions for the Christian who has fallen away from the Lord. The journey to recovery from the guilt of sin involves three stopping places. The first is acknowledgement, as we declare our sinfulness and recognize that we have received God's correction. The second is asking or calling upon God to grant forgiveness. The third is accepting the forgiveness that God has granted to us with gratitude and with a renewed commitment to obey His will. After these three stops are made, one can resume his or her journey of Christian living with confidence, hope, assurance, integrity, and a clean conscience.

Eddie Cloer



No wonder each Christian spends much of his remaining life singing of the grace that has saved him from sin:

*Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,
Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt,
Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured,
There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.*

*Sin and despair like the sea waves cold,
Threaten the soul with infinite loss;
Grace that is greater, yes, grace untold,
Points to the Refuge, the Mighty Cross.*

*Dark is the stain that we cannot hide,
What can avail to wash it away?
Look! there is flowing a crimson tide;
Whiter than snow you may be today.*

*Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,
Freely bestowed on all who believe;
You that are longing to see His face,
Will you obey and His grace receive?*

*Grace, grace, God's grace,
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;
Grace, grace, God's grace,
Grace that is greater than all our sin.*

²Julia H. Johnston, "Grace Greater Than Our Sin," *Sacred Selections for the Church*, comp. and ed. Ellis J. Crum (Kendallville, Ind.: Sacred Selections, 1973).