

GUILT, GRACE, AND GRATITUDE

STUDY ONE

Giving Thanks for God's Forgiveness

Psalm 32:1–11

Today is the day to come to terms with the fact that your wonderful God is filled with forgiveness.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

CHUCK Colson never knew true freedom until he went to prison.

As special counsel to President Richard Nixon in the early 1970s, he was convicted of crimes related to the Watergate scandal and served seven months in prison. A former Marine, Colson was tough and aggressive. But his fall from the heights of political power broke his spirit and humiliated him. In tears, he poured out his heart to God in sorrow and confession.

God forgave this proud man and turned his prison term into a doorway to ministry. God's forgiveness was the key that freed Chuck Colson from his cell of shame, and he committed the rest of his life to sharing that key to freedom with others behind prison bars. After his release, he founded Prison Fellowship to serve prisoners and their families and advocate for a restorative justice system based on biblical principles.

A prison psychiatrist once confided to a Prison Fellowship team member, "I can cure somebody's madness, but I can't cure his badness."¹ Self-improvement strategies may change a person's behavior, medications may treat a person's illness, but real change occurs in the heart. Only God's forgiveness can cure the disease of sin and free the imprisoned soul—and for that, we are eternally thankful.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Open this *Searching the Scriptures* study asking God for insight into the power of His forgiveness.

Father, through Your Word, open my eyes to the wonders of Your forgiveness so my affection for You will be sweeter, my gratitude more sincere, and my worship richer. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Psalm 32 is David's ode to the forgiveness of God. David had committed a series of sins including a scandalous affair with Bathsheba, which resulted in her becoming pregnant (*2 Samuel 11:1–5*). Trying to hide his sin, David summoned Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, from the battlefield, thinking that a drunken Uriah would lie with his wife and then assume he had fathered the child. But Uriah proved a better man when drunk than David was when sober. Uriah refused to go home, so David had him positioned upfront on the battlefield to be killed. Then David took Bathsheba as his wife (*11:6–27*).

Most people knew nothing about their king's wrongdoings, and those who had suspicions kept quiet. The Lord, however, had seen it all, and He "was displeased with what David had done" (*11:27*). He sent Nathan to confront David, and only then did David cry out: "I have sinned against the Lord" (*12:13*).

Sometime later, David etched onto parchment the torment his guilt caused his soul and the relief of confessing his sin. Read *Psalm 32* in its entirety, feeling the emotions that flowed from David's pen.



Observation: A Song of Confession and Forgiveness

Searching the Scriptures is a four-step Bible study method that includes observing the passage, interpreting the meaning, correlating with similar passages, and applying the principles.²

Our first *observation* is that Psalm 32 is part of a collection of Hebrew worship songs, and the literary genre is poetry. Poems are meant to move us emotionally and touch us deeply. Look for parallelism, figures of speech, and vivid expressions in David's writing. Reading Psalm 32, you can almost see the tearstains on the page as David poured out his heart to the Lord.

Also observe the word, *Selah*, after certain sections of the psalm (*Psalm 32:4, 5, 7 NASB*). The word indicates an interlude, telling the reader or singer to pause and let the message resonate. These *Selaha*s divide the psalm into four sections or stanzas. We can divide the first stanza into two for a total of five stanzas.



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Stanza One: The Blessedness of Forgiveness—Psalm 32:1–2

What words are repeated in the opening stanza in *Psalm 32:1–2*? What was David's emotion?

The verbs state the reasons for joy. Write down the verbs, noting that most of them are passive. Who was the doer and what blessings were given?

Psalm 32 reads like a beatitude. Every time “blessed” appears in the Hebrew text, it’s in the plural. Multiple blessings come to the one “whose transgression is forgiven” (Psalm 32:1 NASB). —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Stanza Two: The Agony of Guilt—Psalm 32:3–4

If a composer orchestrated Psalm 32, how would the musical mood shift in *32:3–4*?



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In these verses, the psalm becomes personal. What did David admit? Based on David's backstory, what were David's sins?

What were the consequences of David's silence?

The Selah is a break in the musical score. There is no sound except the sound of weeping.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Stanza Three: The Relief of Confession—Psalm 32:5

What did David do, according to *Psalm 32:5*? How did God respond?



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What happened to David's guilt?

We know how refreshing a wonderful, cool shower can be after hard work on a summer day. This was David's experience. David was cleansed. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Stanza Four: The Prayer of Protection—Psalm 32:6–7

What does the word, *Therefore*, signify in *Psalm 32:6*?

Based on David's experience, what should people do when they sin?



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According to *Psalm 32:7*, why should we look to God?

Shame will keep you from confessing. "Don't waste your time. Your sin is too heinous." These are the floods of great waters. When you come to God, you will not be overwhelmed by them. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Stanza Five: The Wisdom of Instruction—Psalm 32:8–11

David then gave a message from God to His people in *Psalm 32:8–9*. What did the Lord promise? What did He warn?

How did David summarize his message in *32:10–11*? What wise counsel did David share?



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The Lord said, "I will be your Teacher. I will be your Counselor. You will never leave My sight." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: What God's Forgiveness Does

In the *interpretation* section, we explore the meaning of the passage. David's first line states the subject of his song: "How blessed is he whose wrongdoing is forgiven" (Psalm 32:1 NASB). What does *forgiven* mean in the context of this psalm? Let's explore David's definitions.

Read *Psalm 32:1–2* in the New Living Translation, New American Standard Bible, and New English Translation. What did David say God does when He forgives? What metaphors did David use?

The words, "forgiven" (32:1) and "forgave" (32:5), are from the Hebrew root, *nasa*—which means "to lift, bear up, carry, take."³ The same word is used of the suffering messiah in *Isaiah 53:12*, who "bore the sins of many." By using this Hebrew word, what was David saying forgiveness means?



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When David sinned, guilt washed over him like “floodwaters of judgment” (Psalm 32:6). When he confessed his sin, however, something unexpected happened. David discovered God not to be a stern judge ready to pound him with His gavel but a “hiding place” (32:7) or shelter. By using this metaphor, what else was David saying God does when He forgives?

What a beautiful, multifaceted diamond is God's forgiveness! When God forgives, He covers our sin, clears our guilt, lifts our shame, and shelters us from judgment. Put these concepts in your own words to describe what it means for God to forgive repentant sinners.



Correlation: Gratitude for God's Forgiveness through Christ

Correlation enhances the meaning of the passage by comparing it to other passages in Scripture. The apostle Paul prayed that we would be “filled with joy, always thanking the Father” (Colossians 1:11–12). What did Paul say we should thank God for, according to *Colossians 1:13–14*?



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Paul used similar expressions in *Ephesians 1:6–8*. What was Paul praising God for?

Truly, Jesus is the face of God's forgiveness. Jesus' blood covers our sin. Because of Jesus, God doesn't count our sins against us. Jesus lifts our guilt, and in Him, we have a hiding place from judgment.

Thank You, Lord, for Your grace in never turning us away when we come, weak and wounded, sick and sore. May we be reminded that You have forgiven all our sins.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: My Gratitude for God's Forgiveness

At first, David tried to conceal his sins, like Adam and Eve sewing fig leaves to hide their shame. Hiding is a natural human response to wrongdoing, but, as David learned, ignoring sin merely causes the sore to fester. How much better it is to expose the infected wound, be honest before the Lord, and, like David, receive God's healing balm of forgiveness. "Unfailing love surrounds those who trust the LORD" (32:10).

Perhaps you are like David, trying to hide your shame. Is now the time to open your heart to the Lord and let God bind your wound in His love and forgiveness, which is only possible through the blood of Christ? If so, what would you like to say to Him?



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Perhaps you have received God's forgiveness, and now you see it in a new light. In the space below, thank the Lord for *covering your sins* with His grace.

Thank the Lord for *clearing your guilt* through His mercy.

Thank the Lord for *lifting your shame* with His love.



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Finally, thank the Lord for *being your hiding place*.

Sin imprisons the soul in guilt and shame, but God's forgiveness heals our wounds and sets us free. Isn't God's forgiveness liberating to your soul? *Rejoice in your freedom!*

*So rejoice in the LORD and be glad, all you who obey him!
Shout for joy, all you whose hearts are pure! (Psalm 32:11)*



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, with my whole heart, I give You thanks for not turning away from me but receiving me when I come to You with my sin. Nothing is hidden from You, so how silly I am to try to cover my shame with fig leaves. Thank You for sending Your Son to bear my guilt and purchase my freedom from sin. I feel safe in Your grace, and I long to abide in Your unfailing love forever. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles Colson, *Who Speaks for God?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, Living Books, 1985), 80.
2. Pastor Chuck Swindoll's approach to studying the Bible is in his book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*. For helpful instruction from Pastor Chuck, consult our web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
3. NET Bible, Word Study, "nasa," <https://netbible.org/bible/Psalm+32>.

