

GUILT, GRACE, AND GRATITUDE

STUDY ONE

Giving Thanks for God's Forgiveness

Psalms 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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Giving Thanks for God's Forgiveness

Psalm 32:1–11



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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Psalm 32:1–11

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?



GUILT, GRACE, AND GRATITUDE

STUDY ONE

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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Giving Thanks for God's Forgiveness

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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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Psalm 32:1–11

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>.



GUILT, GRACE, AND GRATITUDE

STUDY TWO

Giving Thanks for God's Grace

Galatians 1:6–10; 5:1, 13–15

Grace lies at the root of forgiveness. The stronger we are in grace, the stronger we are in forgiving.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IN American households, the aroma of Thanksgiving is unmistakable. For hours, the delicious smell of slow-roasting turkey fills the whole house with anticipation. Spiced stuffing, sweet potato casserole, green beans, pumpkin pie, and Grandma's homemade yeast rolls tantalize the senses. When Mom finally calls the family for dinner, wide-eyed children and adults gather around the festive table, their mouths watering. Dad prays and the feast begins.

Plates are piled high, glasses clink, and conversation flows as everyone savors the meal until satisfied. Then, it's time for giving thanks. One-by-one, family members serve up words of gratitude to the Lord for a year's worth of blessings.

Here's an interesting thought. *What if, this Thanksgiving, King David dropped by?* What thanks do you think he would offer? Based on our previous study of Psalm 32, David would likely thank God for His forgiveness. In somber tones, he would recount his affair with Bathsheba, his scheme against her husband, and the scandal that rocked his family and nation. He would choke back tears as he spoke of his unworthiness, and yet God still forgave him.

What if the apostle Paul came to dinner too? Staining his pre-conversion record was the blood of Christians he had hunted down. Like David, Paul would be grateful for forgiveness, but no doubt, he would also point to the fount from which God's forgiveness flows—God's grace.



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Giving Thanks for God's Grace

Galatians 1:6–10; 5:1, 13–15



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Ask the Lord to ground you more securely in His grace as you study passages from Paul's epistles in this *Searching the Scriptures* study.

Father, take my hand through Your Word, and lead me to Your clear and refreshing pools of grace, where I can dive into Your wonders. Enhance my worship with understanding and fill my heart with a deep gratitude for all You have done for me. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The most common definition of *grace* is “undeserved favor.” People show undeserved favor to others in all kinds of ways, from giving a stranded motorist a lift to the gas station to forgiving a debt that someone can't repay. But grace on a human scale is infinitesimal compared to divine grace.

In God's spiritual economy, no scarcity of grace exists, only abundance—more than enough to cover all the world's sins. “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,” Paul declared (Romans 5:20 NASB). When Peter asked Jesus whether he should forgive a person as many as seven times, Jesus replied, “seventy times seven!” (Matthew 18:22). Jesus was calculating in grace terms. There is no limit to forgiveness when we draw from God's limitless reservoir of grace.

All the blessings of the gospel stream from God's grace. Through Christ's death and resurrection, sinners receive by faith a righteousness from God that they don't deserve and can't achieve. Paul tirelessly proclaimed this message . . . and fiercely defended it.



Observation: The Gospel Minus Grace Equals No Gospel

In the battleground of the first-century church, the primary enemies of grace were Jewish legalists. They insisted that, to be truly saved, Gentile believers must practice Jewish rituals, such as circumcision, purity rites, and holy days.



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STUDY TWO

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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Giving Thanks for God's Grace

Galatians 1:6–10; 5:1, 13–15

These legalists won over some Galatian converts, which prompted Paul to write an urgent letter of caution. What alarm bells did Paul ring in *Galatians 1:6–7*? Write down the main verbs Paul used to describe what the Galatians were wrongly doing.

According to *1:8–9*, what strong rebuke did Paul issue *twice*?

What tone do you pick up in Paul's words? How might his readers have felt? Why do you think he wrote this way?



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Giving Thanks for God's Grace

Galatians 1:6–10; 5:1, 13–15

Some might have been offended by Paul's sharp rebuke. What did he say in [Galatians 1:10](#) to defend himself?

*Christ's work is finished work. We're not required to finish what's already been finished.
The Galatian Christians believed that until a group of legalists moved in.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



Interpretation: What Is the Gospel of Grace?

In the *interpretation* section, we seek to know how Paul's original readers would have understood the passage. Paul exhorted the Galatians to beware of a “different” gospel, one that “pretends to be the Good News but is not the Good News at all” (Galatians 1:6–7).

What Good News had Paul already preached to the Galatians, according to [2:16](#)? How is a person saved?



Giving Thanks for God's Grace

Galatians 1:6–10; 5:1, 13–15

According to [Galatians 3:13](#), what did Jesus do for us on the cross?

*The Good News is that God has come to our rescue because we couldn't rescue ourselves.
He did that when He gave His Son to die for us, who paid the complete penalty for our sins.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

On the cross, Christ did all the work to save us because, in our sinning state, we were helpless to save ourselves. Through faith, we receive what we don't deserve—a righteousness from God we could never match with our own efforts (3:6–7). *That's grace!*

Legalists, however, “deliberately twist the truth concerning Christ” (1:7). According to [2:4](#), what did the Jewish legalists try to force on Christians?

Under their spell, what were Galatian believers trying to do, according to [4:10](#) and [5:3–4](#)? What were the spiritual consequences?



Giving Thanks for God's Grace

Galatians 1:6–10; 5:1, 13–15

In summary, put in your own words the “different gospel” Jewish legalists were teaching. How is this message anti-grace?

Put in your own words the pro-grace gospel that Paul preached.

The grace of God provides not only rescue but the warm blanket of righteousness and the security of an eternal home. We receive salvation, not because we earned it but because God, in His grace, has declared it to be so. When will we get that clear? To turn from the gospel of grace, we turn from the God of grace. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: My Poverty and God's Riches

In the *correlation* phase, let's see how Paul illustrated grace using a wealth metaphor. In financial terms, God is rich in righteousness and we are poor. None of our good deeds amount to much because “we all fall short of God's glorious standard” (Romans 3:23). In terms of personal righteousness, we don't have two cents to rub together.



Giving Thanks for God's Grace

Galatians 1:6–10; 5:1, 13–15

According to [2 Corinthians 8:9](#), however, what did Jesus Christ do for us? How did He model grace?

In Christ, we are rich in His righteousness. How grateful we are!

The wealthy God of righteousness comes to abjectly poor people like you and like me, and He declares us righteous. That's marvelous news! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: My Gratitude for God's Grace

Thanking God for His blessings is not just for Thanksgiving Day. In the space below, thank God today for sending His Son to die for your sins, crediting His righteousness to your account, and calling you as His own.

What other aspects of God's grace from our study can you thank God for?



Giving Thanks for God's Grace

Galatians 1:6–10; 5:1, 13–15

Even though Christ bore our sins on the cross, legalists say God isn't satisfied. Faith in Christ isn't enough, and we must somehow do more to earn His favor. Legalists enslave us to the law from which Christ set us free by His grace.

If you sometimes fear that God isn't satisfied with you, how can you better rest securely in God's grace?

If Paul sat at your Thanksgiving table this year, what encouragement would he give you? How might he reassure you?

The gospel implores you to trust in Jesus alone, *resting completely* in His marvelous grace. Then, with a heart full of thanksgiving for your salvation through grace alone, you are free to live for God.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for redeeming me and receiving me in Christ as Your child. You have given me what I don't deserve and could never earn—a place in Your kingdom and a home with You for eternity. Only by Your grace am I accepted. Your grace sets me free to live for You and fulfill the calling You have given me. May I always be grateful for Your grace. In Jesus' name, amen.



GUILT, GRACE, AND GRATITUDE

STUDY TWO

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

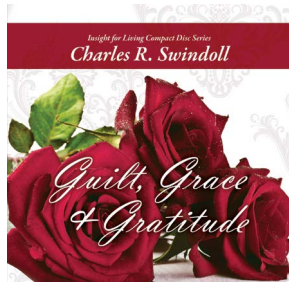
STUDY

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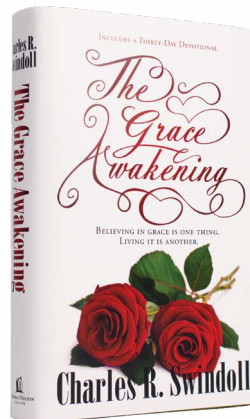
Galatians 1:6–10; 5:1, 13–15



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