

Explore the Bible.®

Summer 2017 > Robert Smith, Jr., General Editor

...and
maketh me to lie
green pastures: ⁴ he leadeth
side the ³ still waters.
³ He restoreth my soul: ² he
eth life in the paths of righteous
for his name's sake.
⁴ Yea, though I walk through
valley of the shadow of death
will fear no evil: ³ for thou
art with me, O God, and thy staff

Psalms

LIFE BY DESIGN

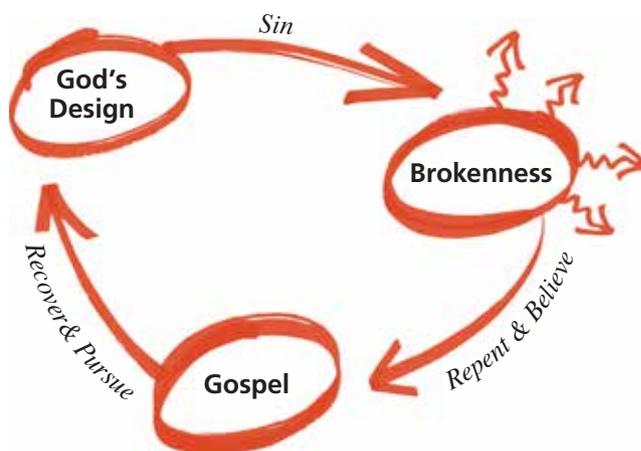
We live in a broken world. This brokenness is seen in suffering, violence, poverty, pain, and death around us. Brokenness leads us to search for a way to make LIFE work.

The Bible tells us that God originally planned a world that worked perfectly—where everything and everyone fit together in harmony. God made each of us with a purpose—to worship Him and walk with Him. (See Genesis 1:31 and Psalm 19:1.)

Life doesn't work when we ignore God and His original design for our lives. We selfishly insist on doing things our own way. The Bible calls this sin. Sin leads to a place of brokenness. The consequence of our sin is separation from God—in this life and for all of eternity. (See Romans 3:23 and Romans 6:23.)

At this point we need a remedy—some good news. Because of His love, God did not leave us in our brokenness. Jesus, God in human flesh, came to us and lived perfectly according to God's Design. Jesus came to rescue us—to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He took our sin and shame to the cross, paying the penalty of our sin by His death. Jesus was then raised from the dead—to provide the only way for us to be rescued and restored to a relationship with God. (See John 3:16; Colossians 2:14; and 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.)

We don't have the power to escape this brokenness on our own. We need to be rescued. We must ask God to forgive us—turning from sin to trust in Jesus. This is what it means to repent and believe. Believing, we receive new life through Jesus. God turns our lives in a new direction. (See Mark 1:15; Ephesians 2:8-9; and Romans 10:9.)



When God restores our relationship to Him, we begin to discover meaning and purpose in a broken world. Now we can pursue God's Design in all areas of our lives. God's Spirit empowers us to recover His Design and assures us of His presence in this life and for all of eternity. (See Philippians 2:13 and Ephesians 2:10.)

Now that you have heard this Good News, God wants you to respond to Him. You can talk to Him using words like these: My life is broken—I recognize it's because of my sin. I believe Christ came to live, die, and was raised from the dead—to rescue me from my sin. Forgive me. I turn from my selfish ways and put my trust in You. I know that Jesus is Lord of all, and I will follow Him.

Excerpted from *Life on Mission: A Simple Way to Share the Gospel*.

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» WRITERS

KAREN DOCKREY wrote the Discussion Plans and Object Lessons for this quarter. She led the team that created *QuickSource*. Karen is passionate about the Bible study experience. She's convinced that when Christians examine and apply God's Word we more readily delight in the richness God designed for us to enjoy. Karen is a product development specialist and the author of more than thirty books including the *Student Bible Dictionary: Revised and Expanded* (2014).

JIMMY HESTER wrote the Key Words and Dig Deeper elements. He is married to Kim, and they have two grown sons and two grandchildren. Jimmy is retired from LifeWay Christian Resources and is co-founder of True Love Waits. Now he serves as Bible Study Director at First Baptist Church, Nashville, Tennessee, and teaches a weekly Bible study for adults.

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ERIC GEIGER

VICE PRESIDENT,
LIFEWAY RESOURCES

ROBERT SMITH, JR.

GENERAL EDITOR

MIKE LIVINGSTONE

CONTENT EDITOR

DWAYNE MCCRARY

TEAM LEADER

KEN BRADY

MANAGER, ADULT ONGOING
BIBLE STUDIES

MICHAEL KELLEY

DIRECTOR, GROUPS MINISTRY

SEND QUESTIONS/COMMENTS TO:

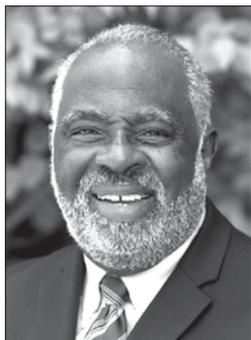
CONTENT EDITOR

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A WORD FROM THE GENERAL EDITOR

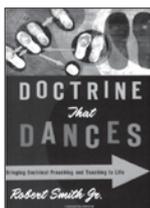


Sometimes, when reading the Bible, it seems as if our lives are worlds apart from those included in the pages of Scripture. It is easy to ponder, sometimes with guilt and secrecy in our hearts, whether the Bible is relevant to feelings we have today, thoughts we have today, struggles we have today, or situations we face today.

This study in the Book of Psalms holds good news for you. A psalmist has likely written about whatever feelings you might experience in any situation in which you find yourself. These lessons speak to those who are soaring on the heights of spiritual growth and to those who are in the depths of spiritual weakness. It legitimizes the feelings of those seeking God's recompense for persecutors and those seeking forgiveness for doing wrong to others. It teaches lessons for dealing with the perils or the successes of life with great grace, patience, and faith while extolling the loving kindness of our God, who is always worthy of praise.

This journey through the Book of Psalms is for you. If you earnestly apply its lessons, it will benefit you and those around you as you seek to walk the narrow path surrounded by distractions, faith challenges, and contemporary thought.

Robert Smith, Jr.



Dr. Smith serves as the Charles T. Carter Baptist Chair of Divinity and professor of Christian preaching at Beeson Divinity School, Birmingham, Alabama. He is the author of Doctrine That Dances: Bring Doctrinal Preaching and Teaching to Life.



TWO WAYS TO USE QUICKSOURCE

➤ AS A SUPPLEMENT TO THE EXPLORE THE BIBLE LEADER GUIDE

1. After completing your study using the commentary provided in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide*, consult the Exploring Key Words section and the Talking Points page for additional insight or as a review.
2. After creating your initial plans for guiding the group time using the suggestions included in the Leader Guide, supplement and refine your plan using the ideas found in *QuickSource*. You will also want to consult the Explore the Bible blog (LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible) or Explore the Bible MinistryGrid page (MinistryGrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible) for additional ideas.

➤ AS YOUR PRIMARY RESOURCE FOR PREPARING TO LEAD A SMALL BIBLE STUDY GROUP

1. Read and study the core passage.

Use Exploring Key Words on the first page of the session content to gain an understanding of the passage. Consult a study Bible and a Bible commentary like the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* (available at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible in both print and digital formats) to gain additional insight into the passage.

2. Review the outline provided on the Talking Points page (page 2 of each session).

Record ideas and insights gleaned from your personal study time. Note: You may want to make a photocopy of the Talking Points page so you can use *QuickSource* again in the future.

3. Review the questions on the Discussion Plan page (page 3 of each session).

Identify the questions you believe would work best with the group you are leading. Reword the selected questions to reflect your personality and the personality of the group. Record the reworded questions on the Talking Points page (or the photocopy you made of the page) next to the point related to the question. Remember to arrange the questions so that you are leading the group to a conclusion or action.

4. Consider ways of using the Object Lesson idea (page 4 of each session).

Brainstorm other ideas sparked by the object lesson suggestion.

5. Read the Dig Deeper feature (page 4 of each session).

Add insights gained from this page to the Talking Points page.

6. Use the *Personal Study Guide* (PSG).

Scan a copy of the *Personal Study Guide* (PSG), looking for additional questions and the Bible skill feature. Consider ways of incorporating the Bible skill into the session, recording your ideas on the Talking Points page. Record additional questions from the PSG on the Talking Points page as well.

7. Review and refine.

Consult the Explore the Bible blog (LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible) or Explore the Bible Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible) for additional ideas.

8. Arrive early.

The group time starts when the first person arrives. Make sure you are that person so you can set the tone and direction for the group Bible study time.

9. Lead the group in a time of Bible study.

Carry the Talking Points page into the class, using this page as your guide for leading the group.



INTRODUCTION TO PSALMS

Psalms has a broad range of content and style. New Testament writers quoted from Psalms and Isaiah more than any other Old Testament books. Paul stated the early church sang psalms in their worship (Eph. 5:19).

»» BACKGROUND

Writer—Numerous people wrote psalms. The writers of some are unknown. Many psalms have a superscription with names such as David, Moses, Asaph, Korah, and Solomon. However, the Hebrew preposition may mean “by,” “for,” “about,” or “concerning.” Thus, “a Davidic psalm” may mean that David wrote the text or in a few cases it may mean something else. The sons of Korah were descendants of the Levite who died for rebelling against Moses and Aaron (Num. 26:10-11). Some served as singers and musicians in the temple choir. Heman was the founder of the choir during the monarchy of David. Asaph and Jeuthum were choir directors.

Date—Each psalm must be dated independently. They were written, used, and collected over the entire period of Israel’s history. They were the result of both personal and national experiences. Psalms was in its present form by the fourth century B.C.

Titles—All but 34 of the psalms have individual titles. Although these titles are very ancient, many scholars conclude that they likely were added after the poems were written. Nonetheless, it is very unlikely that later scribes would have inserted titles to psalms that did not clearly reflect the situation described in the title.

Outline—Since ancient times, Psalms has been divided into five books, presumably corresponding to the five books of the Law. Each division ends in a doxology (Ps. 41:13, 72:19, etc.). Psalm 1 serves as an introduction to Psalms, Psalm 150 as the conclusion.

»» PSALM TYPES

Many psalms are not neatly or easily categorized. However, identification of type helps readers gain insight into the psalm’s use and original context. The religious feelings and expressions found in the psalms may overlap between classifications. A few psalms (25; 34; 119) are acrostically arranged according to the Hebrew alphabet, probably to aid memorization.

Lament—A lament can be expressed by the community (44; 79) or an individual (22; 54). Both are prayers due to distressful situations. Differences are related to the type of trouble and the experiences of salvation. For the community, the trouble may be an enemy; for an individual, it may be an illness. The basic pattern includes an invocation of God, a description of the petitioner's complaint(s), recollection of past deliverance, petitions, a divine response, and a concluding vow of praise.

Thanksgiving—Thanksgiving psalms likewise originate in the community (106; 129) and individuals (9; 30). They are expressions of joy in response to rescue from distress.

Hymn—The hymn is closest to a modern song of praise. These psalms normally include a call to praise, then describes reasons for praising God.

Royal—Royal psalms celebrate Israel's earthly king. They may include an oracle for the king. In some cases intercessory prayers were offered on behalf of the king. Some royal psalms have messianic implications and fulfillments (2; 89; 110).

Enthronement—Enthronement psalms celebrate Yahweh's kingship. They are closely related to the hymns. The main difference is a celebration of Yahweh as King over all creation.

Penitential—Penitential psalms are expressions of contrition and repentance. They plead for restoration to a right relationship with God.

Wisdom/Didactic—This type has poetic form and style but is distinguished because of content and a tendency toward the proverbial. These psalms contemplate questions of theodicy (73), celebrate God's Word (119), or deal with two different ways of living—that of the godly person or the evil person (1).

TYPES OF PSALMS

Lament—emotional cries to God for deliverance from distressful situations

Pss. 3–5; 7; 12–13; 17; 22; 25–27; 35; 39–44; 54–60; 62; 64; 69–71; 74; 77; 79–80; 83; 85–86; 88; 90; 94; 120; 123; 126; 134; 137; 140–142; 144

Thanksgiving—expressions of gratitude to God for His abundant blessings

Pss. 9–11; 16; 23; 30–31; 34; 48; 62; 66–68; 75; 91–92; 106–109; 115–116; 118; 121; 124–125; 129; 131; 138–139

Hymn—declarations of the greatness of God

Pss. 8; 15; 19; 24; 29; 33; 46; 52; 65; 81–82; 87; 100; 103–105; 111; 113–114; 117; 122; 135–136; 145–150

Royal—prayers for God’s blessings on Israel’s king, some with messianic implications/fulfillments

Pss. 2; 18; 20–21; 45; 50; 61; 63; 72; 84; 89; 101; 110; 132

Enthronement—celebrations of God’s rule over all His creation

Pss. 47; 93–99

Penitential—expressions of contrition and repentance

Pss. 6; 28; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143

Wisdom/Didactic—practical guidelines for godly living

Pss. 1; 14; 36–37; 49; 53; 73; 76; 78; 112; 119; 127–128; 133

SESSION 1

THE PATH

PSALM 1:1-6

- ¹ How **a** happy is the one who **b** does not walk in the advice of the wicked or **c** stand in the pathway with sinners or **d** sit in the company of mockers!
- ² Instead, his **e** delight is in **f** the LORD's instruction, and he **g** meditates on it day and night.
- ³ He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams that **h** bears its fruit in its season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.
- ⁴ The wicked are not like this; instead, they are like **i** chaff that the wind blows away.
- ⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand up in the **j** judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
- ⁶ For the LORD **k** watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to **l** ruin.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** A secular understanding of happiness is dependent on whether or not positive things are happening; a biblical understanding is based on a believer's contentment regardless of circumstances.
- b** Look to evil people for guidance; "who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked [following their advice and example]" (AMP)
- c** Loiter with those who are habitually moral failures
- d** Scorns the sacred and mocks God; "sit in the seat of scoffers" (NASB); "sitteth in the seat of the scornful" (KJV); "sit [down to rest] in the seat of scoffers (ridiculers)" (AMP)
- e** Meaning our joy, satisfaction, gratification, pleasure, or confidence
- f** The "law of the LORD" (NLT); the revelation of God's will for His people rather than a body of legislative material or a collection of judicial decisions
- g** Literally means mumbling to oneself—an activity closely related to concentrating on something in order to understand it
- h** The yield of the spiritual life in the individual
- i** The husk and other useless materials separated from the kernel of grain during the threshing or winnowing process
- j** Some see this as the final judgment of God because it is definite (the judgment); others understand this as God's judgment whether in this life or in the future
- k** "For God watches how people live; he sees everything they do" (Job 34:21, NLT).
- l** Eternal separation from God

1. THE PATH OF LIFE (Ps. 1:1-3)

- The psalmist compared the person who follows God’s counsel to a productive tree planted near a river. He declared that the person who follows the counsel of God’s Word (as opposed to listening to the counsel of the wicked) will flourish and produce fruit.
- Note: Carefully explain that verse 3 does not guarantee financial prosperity. Focus on living a fruitful and rewarding life in every stage of life.

2. THE PATH OF DEATH (Ps. 1:4-5)

- The psalmist pointed out that the wicked are like worthless chaff that is blown by the wind.
- He warned his readers that the wicked face sure judgment and eternal separation from God’s righteous people.
- Note: Emphasize that death for the wicked in Scripture means eternal separation from God.

3. THE CONCLUSION (Ps. 1:6)

- The psalmist stated that God protects the righteous while allowing the wicked to move toward disaster.

» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

Believers should embrace godly wisdom because obedience to God’s Word is the path of true life.

- Fulfillment in life is found through faithful obedience to God and His Word.
- We have been warned that falling for the deceptive advice of the wicked leads to instability, worthlessness, and destruction.
- Believers can live with confidence, knowing that God guarantees His protection to the obedient.



FOCUS ATTENTION

How do people search for happiness today?

- People seek happiness in many things, including work, wealth, and hobbies. Yet God says we will find true contentment in faithful obedience to Him and His Word.
- Psalm 1 is a wisdom psalm. It teaches us how to put spiritual principles into daily practice.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE PSALM 1:1-3

How do these verses describe those who are “happy” and those who are “wicked”?

- “Happy” (v. 1) means blessed, a deep down contentment from those who follow after God.

How is prosperity the result of finding delight in God?

- Prosperity is cultivated. It’s not magic or entitlement.
- Prosperity is more what we do than what we don’t do.

Through what actions does relational prosperity come? Through what actions does career prosperity come?

- Verses 1-3 illustrate the Bible interpretation principle of reading the verses before and after to understand a particular verse.
- Notice what verses 1-2 teach about verse 3 and what verse 3 teaches about verses 1-2.

There’s certainly nothing ungodly about financial prosperity—Abraham was financially prosperous. Joseph invested in savvy financial actions that saved the nation of Egypt and beyond. So how and why might financial prosperity come to a believer?

- Verse 3 does not guarantee financial prosperity.
- Finances find their place when our foundation is obedience to God and His Word.
- God will show us how to build and use finances and possessions no matter how much we have.
- Finances are only one way to be prosperous.

PSALM 1:4-5

Compare verses 1-3 with verses 4-5. How are wickedness and righteousness something we choose or refuse day after day?

- People cultivate blessing when they follow God in daily routines, remaining focused on being obedient to Him.
- Falling for the deceptive advice of the wicked leads to instability, worthlessness, and destruction.

PSALM 1:6

What determines whether or not God watches over us?

- Invite examples of daily habits that deepen roots, bear fruit, and bring prosperity (vv. 1-3).
- Invite examples of daily habits that let us be blown to and fro like the chaff (vv. 4-5).

What does it mean for God to watch over us?

How does embracing wisdom work hand in hand with God’s protection?

- God protects the righteous while allowing the wicked to move toward disaster.
- Believers can live with confidence that God watches over the obedient.
- Moses set two ways before the Israelites—life and prosperity or death and adversity (Deut. 30:15). Jesus identified the narrow and the wide paths (Matt. 7:13-14). This psalmist also detailed these two choices.

Why might a person assume it’s safe to choose wickedness? What is the result of disobeying God?

- All persons will face judgment.
- The wicked will not survive it; they will be separated from God and people.
- Death for the wicked means eternal separation from God.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

Embracing godly wisdom is more than intellectual ascent. It affects every area of life. Name one area of life you tend to think of as neutral, not really mattering to God. Then name a reason it does matter to God, and how to be righteous in that area.

- Fixing breakfast can be done with grumbling or with care for family members. Other examples abound.
- View Psalm 1 in relation to the entire book (ch. 1–150). For example, in Psalm 1 God blesses the righteous, and in Psalm 150 the righteous bless God.
- **Personal Challenge:** Look back at decisions you made yesterday. For which did you follow “the advice of the wicked”? Which followed “the pathway with sinners” (1:1)? Which delighted in “the LORD’s instruction” (1:2)? Build upon those insights to make tomorrow’s choices ones that delight God.

OBJECT LESSON

A ROLL OF PAPER TOWELS

Display a roll of paper towels. Explain: *Where we lay the paper towel determines what it will soak up. Similarly we will soak up whatever or whoever is near us.* Invite examples of how this happens. Read Psalm 1:1-3. Call on group members to name several ways this is like the teaching of these verses.

Ask: *Can a paper towel resist the moisture against which it is placed? When can people resist the persons and activities around them? How might we have difficulty resisting them?*

Read Psalm 1:4 to compare it to what causes a paper towel to fall to pieces or to otherwise stop fulfilling its purpose. Stress that Psalm 1 gives us wisdom for fulfilling our purposes. Say: *Paper towels are used for several purposes. We have both simple and complex purposes that we best fulfill when we are “planted beside flowing streams” (1:3) rather than blown away “like chaff” (1:4).* Prompt the group to describe some of these purposes for which God created us such as caring for the persons around us and doing our daily work.

Give each group member a paper towel to crease, and then have them work out those creases. Explain that even if we have moved



toward the disaster described in Psalm 1:4-6, we can choose to open back up to God’s work in our life. We can begin to obey Him and stop taking the advice of the wicked. Ask: *What makes a person falsely conclude that they’ve creased their lives too severely to work out? What steps allow someone being blown by the wind to plant beside streams of water? How can we give one another the courage to do this?*

DIG DEEPER

LESSONS FROM A TREE

The image of a tree appears throughout Scripture. The creation account in Genesis speaks of trees: “The LORD God caused to grow out of the ground every tree pleasing in appearance and good for food, including the tree of life in the middle of the garden, as well as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:9). The writer of Proverbs gives an example of the use of the tree to explain righteousness: “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and a wise person captivates people” (Prov. 11:30).

In the New Testament, the Gospel of Matthew equates the purpose of a believer’s testimony with the ability of a tree to produce fruit (see Matt. 3:10; 12:33; 21:19). Jesus’ death on a cross is often spoken of using the image of a tree. “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree; so that, having died to sins, we might live by righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.” (1 Pet. 2:24).

In Psalm 1, the righteous person is like a tree carefully planted beside streams of water. This tree teaches several lessons:

- The tree has been transplanted by the gardener where it can grow best; spiritual happiness is God-given, not a human achievement.
- The tree is planted where there is an ample water supply; in the dry country of Palestine rain is limited, and if the winter rains fail to come, disaster threatens.

- The tree tended by the gardener is fruitful in its season; the outcome is both joy and usefulness—fulfilling its purpose.

- The leaves on the tree do not wither; the evergreen symbolizes immortality.

- The tree flourishes; it is planted, sturdy, and able to survive the storms.

Righteous people are not perfect. They may have doubts, anxieties, or failures, which are all sins. But the righteous are growing, useful people with purpose in living. Their nourishment comes from God.

Jeremiah, a sixth- and seventh-century Israelite prophet from Judah, echoed the words of the psalmist when he said, “The person who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence indeed is the LORD, is blessed. He will be like a tree planted by water: it sends its roots out toward a stream, it doesn’t fear when heat comes, and its foliage remains green. It will not worry in a year of drought or cease producing fruit” (Jer. 17:7-8).

SESSION 2

THE PAST

PSALM 78:5-8,32-39

⁵ He established **A** a testimony in Jacob and set up a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to **B** teach to their children ⁶ so that a future generation—children yet to be born—might know. They were to rise and tell their children ⁷ so that they might put their **C** confidence in God and not forget **D** God's works, but keep his commands. ⁸ Then they would not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose **E** heart was not loyal and whose **F** spirit was not faithful to God. [...]

³² Despite all this, they kept sinning and did not believe his **G** wondrous works. ³³ He made their days end in **H** futility, their years in sudden disaster. ³⁴ When he killed some of them, the rest began to seek him; they **I** repented and searched for God. ³⁵ They remembered that God was their **J** rock, **K** the Most High God, their Redeemer. ³⁶ But they deceived him with their mouths, they lied to him with their tongues, ³⁷ their hearts were insincere toward him, and they were unfaithful to his covenant. ³⁸ Yet he was **L** compassionate; he **M** atoned for their iniquity and did not destroy them. He often turned his anger aside and did not unleash all his wrath. ³⁹ He remembered that they were **N** only flesh, a wind that passes and does not return.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** God gave commands to the Israelites, His Law from Genesis 17:10-14 to Deuteronomy 32:46.
- b** Deuteronomy 6:7-9 outlines God's instructions for spiritual development.
- c** "Set their hope in God" (KJV, ESV); "place their confidence in God" (AMP)
- d** A reminder of both the number and magnitude of God's previous activities among His people
- e** The heart is the center of the physical, mental, and spiritual life of humans (see Jer. 17:9-10).
- f** The human spirit is associated with a wide range of functions including thinking, understanding, emotions, attitudes, and intentions.
- g** A reference to God's mighty acts to provide and protect the nation so as to encourage their trust and belief in Him
- h** "Consume in vanity" (KJV); "in failure" (NLT); "vanish like a breath" (ESV); "like a breath [in emptiness and futility]" (AMP)
- i** Some turned from their sinful ways and earnestly sought after God.
- j** The use of rocky sites as places of refuge (Num. 24:21; Judg. 15:8; 20:47) led to the image of God as a rock, a source of protection.
- k** A reminder of God's status among all other gods: "I am the First and I am the Last; And there is no God besides Me" (Isa. 44:6).
- l** The act of setting aside feelings of anger, destruction, and revenge while sympathetically and mercifully focusing on the condition and circumstances facing another person
- m** Wiped out, forgave, absolved, redeemed
- n** Temporary, vulnerable, fleeting; "merely mortal" (NLT)

1. TEACH FOR THE FUTURE

(Ps. 78:5-8)

- The psalmist (Asaph) called on the people of Israel to teach their children God's commandments and the danger of disobeying those commandments, as seen in Israel's past.

2. REMEMBER THE PAST

(Ps. 78:32-37)

- Asaph reminded the people of Israel of their past cycles of failure, God's discipline, and their return to God.
- Characterize their repentance as insincere and self-deceptive.
- Emphasize that they had a form of belief that was in response to God's severe judgment and not in response to His compassion directed toward them.

3. COMPASSION IN THE PRESENT

(Ps. 78:38-39)

- Asaph contrasted Israel's repeated unfaithfulness to God's unwavering compassion.
- He emphasized humanity's mortality as God's motivation for extending grace.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

We can learn from the past as we observe God's faithfulness in contrast to humanity's unfaithfulness.

- Believers are responsible for teaching future generations about God and His compassionate dealing with humanity.
- True repentance leads to a growing relationship with God that includes willful obedience.
- God provided atonement for our sin and rebellion, offering forgiveness through faith in Jesus.



FOCUS ATTENTION

Everybody likes a good story. What are some stories told in your family?

- Good stories help us remember truth.
- Psalm 78 is rich with stories of historical events—plagues that led to freedom from Egyptian slavery, God parting the Red Sea, God’s provision of food during the journey, rebellion expressed through building high places for fake gods, God residing among the people in the tabernacle, God choosing David to lead, and more.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE PSALM 78:5-8

Psalm 78 is a wisdom psalm that urges people to teach God’s commands to their children. What are ways to teach besides telling? How might you put God’s faithfulness into one sentence stories?

- Deuteronomy 6:1-9 similarly encourages daily teaching of God’s truth.
- Psalm 78 shows two ways to live—respect and obey God, or ignore God and assume you’re smarter than Him.

What reasons do Psalm 78:5-8 give for this intentional teaching?

- Believers must teach future generations about God and His compassionate dealing with people so that the children “might put their confidence in God” (v. 7).

Who in the previous generation taught you about God?

- God uses both older and younger people to teach us His truth.

PSALM 78:32-37

The Bible records the tendency for God’s people to turn from God, fail, receive God’s discipline, and then return to God. What clues do Psalm 78:32-37 give for why this happens?

- God’s people have a history of rebelling, even after devoting themselves to God.
- Even people who crossed the Red Sea (Ps. 78:13) and recipients of God’s miraculous feeding (Ps. 78:15-20) refused God’s loving direction.
- The people’s repentance was insincere and self-deceptive. They had a form of belief that responded to God’s judgment and not His compassion.

For what reasons might a person risk lying or being unfaithful to God? On the other hand, what would lead someone to be sincere in repentance and trust of God?

- Guide the group to evaluate themselves rather than fuss about other people.

- Lead the group to discuss what makes us learn or not learn from history.
- What hints might these processes give about how to teach a child about God?

Read aloud Psalm 78:35 again. How does this verse motivate us to desire to be faithful to God?

- Seeing God’s character draws us toward Him.
- When we focus on God’s character, our faithfulness grows out of gratefulness rather than the fear of getting caught.

PSALM 78:38-39

Why do you suppose the people didn’t learn to trust God after the first few cycles? How prominent is this same cycle today?

- When we don’t trust God, it is often because of our selfishness, pride, stubbornness, or assuming we know better.
- Setting ourselves in opposition to God means we will cause pain in our lives and in the lives of those around us.
- True repentance generates willful obedience.

What hints do these Bible verses give to the secrets of choosing obedience?

- God’s compassion draws us to Him.
- Love motivates more effectively than punishment.
- Asaph emphasized human mortality as God’s motivation for extending grace.
- God provided atonement for our sin and rebellion, offering forgiveness through Jesus.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

Whether good or bad is happening in your life right now, what examples can you cite of God’s faithfulness? What story might teach this to a child?

- The Holy Spirit provides wisdom for believers as He leads and guides them to know what to do and how to do it (John 16:13).
- Jesus Christ is the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24).
- **Personal Challenge:** Write, in words a young child can understand, the story of God’s faithfulness throughout history, using Psalm 78 as a foundation. Then add how we can see and respond to God’s faithfulness today.

OBJECT LESSON

A RELIGHTING BIRTHDAY CANDLE

Hold up the relighting birthday candle and ask the group to share ways they've celebrated birthdays. Say: *In Psalm 78:5-8 the psalmist called the family of Israel to teach their children God's commandments and God's past actions on their behalf. Ask: What might need to be taught about God to a child in any one year?*

Explain that this particular birthday candle is called a relighting because it reignites after being blown out. Explain: *This candle is similar to the unfaithful behavior of someone who speaks devotion to God but then goes his or her own way. Blowing on this candle stops the flame for a moment, but then it relights. In the same way, insincere repentance may look good at first but then selfishness reignites and rebellion flames.*

List as a group troubles that reignite in our lives when we merely talk about honoring God rather than actually honoring Him. Read Psalm 78:32-37 to see how the people of Israel allowed this to happen.

Light the candle, blow it out, and watch it reignite. Repeat. After a few relights, drop the candle into a cup of water (if appropriate based on your location and safety concerns).



Say: *Specific actions must happen to get this flame, and the flame of unfaithfulness, totally extinguished. God provided atonement for our sin and rebellion through faith in His Son. Read Psalm 78:38-39. List as a group some joys that bring light to our lives when we respond to God's compassion with faithfulness to Him.*

DIG DEEPER

LESSONS FROM HISTORY

It's been said that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."¹ The theme of Psalm 78 is the repeated disobedience of God's people in spite of all His mighty acts on their behalf. The psalmist drew lessons from three major events in Israel's history: the exodus from Egypt, the wilderness wanderings, and the conquest of Canaan. The psalmist wanted his audience to learn from the past.

Consider the wilderness wanderings as recalled in Hebrews 3:7-10. The Bible often tells us the sad history of the 40 years that God's people spent in the desert.

Moses was their leader. He was God's servant, and he trusted God completely. But on several occasions, the people refused to trust God. They preferred to complain about Moses and God. They were disloyal. They doubted when they should have believed God. They complained when they should have trusted Him. And they refused to obey Him.

But the people should have learned from previous events that they could trust God completely. It was God who saved them from slavery in Egypt. It was God who overcame Egypt's great army. It was God who provided their supplies of food and water. It was God who showed them the route to follow. God provided their

light by night, and He provided protection from the hot sun by day. God even defended them when enemies attacked. They had no reason not to trust God—and they had nobody else to trust. But whenever there were problems, their fears seemed too strong, and so fear replaced faith.

Those addressed by the writer of Hebrews were no doubt proud of their family and nation's history. They were proud that Moses had been their leader. But maybe they should not have been so proud. It was their own families who refused to obey God. It was their own families who would not trust God in the desert.

We would do well to learn from history, to avoid repeating the mistakes others have made. People should learn that they must always trust God.

1. George Santayana, *The Life of Reason*, 1905

SESSION 3

THE SHEPHERD

PSALM 23:1-6

- 1** The LORD is my **A shepherd**;
I have what I need.
- 2** He lets me lie down in **B green pastures**;
he leads me beside **C quiet waters**.
- 3** He **D renews my life**;
he leads me along the **E right paths**
for his name's sake.
- 4** Even when I go **F through the darkest valley**,
I fear no danger,
for you are with me;
G your rod and your staff—they comfort me.
- 5** You prepare a **H table** before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you **I anoint my head with oil**;
J my cup overflows.
- 6** Only **K goodness and faithful love** will pursue me
all the days of my life,
and I will **L dwell** in the house of the LORD
as long as I live.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** Referenced in the Bible more than 200 times; responsibilities were feeding, guiding, and protecting sheep; biblical shepherds included Abraham, Rachel, Jacob, Moses, and David; the metaphor was often used with kings and Egyptian pharaohs, and Jesus used it to speak of Himself.
- b** God's physical provision for food and a comfortable resting place to sleep
- c** God's physical provision for water drawn from a calming, refreshing stream
- d** God's spiritual provision to restore vitality to life
- e** "Paths of righteousness" (KJV, NASB, ESV); "the right direction" (MSG). Job 27:6 says "I hold fast my uprightness and my right standing with God and I will not let them go" (AMP).
- f** "The valley of the shadow of death" (KJV, ESV, NASB). "Through" describes a transition from one place to another, not a dead end but a passageway.
- g** Commonly known as shepherd's equipment—a rod for protection and a crook to guide the sheep—God both protects and guides His people in the way we should go.
- h** The imagery shifts to a gracious and thoughtful host who sets a banquet table for his guests.
- i** An act of personally honoring the guest and signifying the guest's worth; the oil, or aromatic ointments, signifies abundance.
- j** The extravagant host has blessed the guest beyond measure or more than he can take in. Psalm 16:5 says "The LORD is the portion of my inheritance, my cup [He is all I need]" (AMP).
- k** In the Hebrew, *chesed*, meaning merciful lovingkindness, a good and unchanging love
- l** Settled, taken up permanent residence

1. PROVIDES (Ps. 23:1-3)

- The psalmist (David) described God as the provider for His sheep, giving nourishment and direction.
- Note: Interpret “right paths” (“paths of righteousness,” KJV) in terms of being safe paths that are free from dangers.

2. GUARDS (Ps. 23:4)

- David characterized God as guarding His sheep, walking with them when they face challenges.
- Note: Emphasize that following the right path sometimes leads through the dark valleys.

3. HOSTS (Ps. 23:5-6)

- David reminded his readers that God serves as a gracious host to His sheep, offering them protection, healing, and shelter.

» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

God can be trusted since He is always good.

- Believers can be confident that God provides for all their needs.
- Believers can be comforted knowing that God promises His presence in every life experience.
- Believers can be thankful for God’s eternal care for them.



FOCUS ATTENTION

Who are some life-giving people you know, and what makes them that way?

- People, made in God's image, who choose to give life provide hints of what life-giving is all about.
- Psalm 23 shows many ways God gives life.
- When we give life, we live out God's purposes.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE PSALM 23:1-3

How specifically do you see God, as the Shepherd, give life to you daily?

- A shepherd gets his sheep where they need to go for daily nourishment and protection.
- The psalmist pictured God giving nourishment and direction.
- "Right paths" ("paths of righteousness," KJV) are safe and good.
- Sometimes getting us where we need to go comes through a Spirit-guided nudge, a Bible verse, an appreciation for the good situation we're in, and so forth.

A shepherd gives his life to his sheep, both in daily giving his energies to his sheep and in special circumstances when he comes between them and danger. How does God do both for you?

- The Holy Spirit lives within believers to lovingly nurture, direct, warn, and counsel.
- God guides believers into all truth (John 16:13).
- Jesus gives His life and leads believers "to springs of living waters" (Rev. 7:17; also see John 10:11).
- The Lord is our Shepherd, and the Shepherd is our Lord.

PSALM 23:4

How did the psalmist define God's protection in this verse?

- A quick read of verse 4 could lead us to conclude that no fear or dangers will come to believers. But we must define God's protection in the way He defines it. Note: This is not easy or automatic to describe, so don't press for a single answer.
- God walks with us as we face challenges.
- Poverty, danger, and evil do come even to those who faithfully follow God. Note: Allow time to let the group honestly wrestle with this.
- God's leadership (vv. 1-3), presence (v. 4), and provision of goodness (vv. 5-6) are woven into His life-giving protection.

How has God walked with you and shown you what to do during a dark or dangerous time?

- God not only goes with us, but He shows us what to do when we suffer or during quiet, rightness, wrongness, darkness, danger, plenty, and goodness.
- The rod and staff are tools of both correction and guidance.
- David characterized God as getting us where we need to be.

How does God's presence in the good and bad times bring comfort to us?

- Often God's guidance helps us completely avoid darkness or danger. Sometimes, however, following the right path leads us directly through the dark valleys.
- Following the wrong path always leads us toward unnecessary dark valleys.

PSALM 23:5-6

What experiences from these verses have already come to you? What reassurance does "in the presence of my enemies" (v. 5) give you?

- The moment we accept Jesus, dwelling in the house of the Lord is not limited to heaven; it includes now, our present day.
- Being at home and in the presence of God is a daily constant.
- God offers believers His continual protection, healing, and shelter.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

List the actions of the Lord, our Shepherd, recorded in Psalm 23. Then choose one, and tell how it changes your daily life.

- God provides (vv. 1-3), lets us "lie down" (v. 2), "leads" (v. 2), quiets (v. 2), "renews" (v. 3), leads us "along the right paths" (v. 3), shows us how to honor His name (v. 3), goes with us "through the darkest valley" (v. 4), guards (v. 4), comforts us (v. 4), prepares nourishment for us (v. 5), hosts and anoints us (v. 5), gives overflowing goodness (v. 5), pursues us with "goodness and faithful love" all the days of our lives (v. 6), shows how to dwell with Him from now to forever (v. 6).
- Because Psalm 23 is familiar we may assume we know all there is to know about it. Instead let's dive more deeply into living it. What do you see fresh in Psalm 23?
- **Personal Challenge:** You are living 24/7 in "the house of the LORD" (v. 6). How will you act as His houseguest? How will you enjoy the company of your Host?

OBJECT LESSON

A FLASHLIGHT

As the group enters, use a flashlight to point each person to a chair in which to sit. Suggest that a flashlight can be used as a pointer in the daytime, and a beam of light in the nighttime. In both cases the flashlight shows which way to go.

Read Psalm 23:1-3 to find images of God showing us which way to go. Call for group members to compare the images found to how God has pointed them in a particular direction for a special purpose.

Direct the group to think about how they used flashlights as children. Ask: *How did the light give you the tools you needed to complete that task?* Read Psalm 23:4. Explain: *God gives us information, similar to how a child uses a flashlight to read in the dark to learn. God gives us the ability to see solutions similar to the way a flashlight lights a tent. How else does God's rod and staff guide us? Comfort us?*

Read Psalm 23:5-6. Instruct the group to take turns using a feature of the flashlight to teach this passage. One might use the batteries to say that God's faithful love energizes me and it never runs out of power the way a battery might. Another might use the on/off switch



to explain that God will show me what people and activities will cultivate faithful love and what elements I need to switch off (v. 6). One might show the inside of the flashlight to illustrate that we have a safe and good place to dwell (v. 6).

Close by suggesting that each time the group uses a flashlight, they thank God for being our provider, guard and host.

DIG DEEPER

TIME IN THE VALLEY

In Psalm 23:1-4, David took the gentle picture of a shepherd with his sheep to describe the relationship God has with us and we with Him. Everything makes sense in our understanding of a shepherd leading his flock to green grass and calm waters. Then we get to verse 4, and it doesn't fit. The valley of the shadow of death conjures thoughts of a dangerous situation where a sheep's life is in jeopardy unless the shepherd is alert and attentive.

But why would a sheep be going through such a place? Not because he strayed off in sin; that is not the point here, because the shepherd is pictured going with his sheep, not snatching him back to the pasture he left behind. No, the reason the sheep is going through the valley is because the shepherd led him there.

The connection between verses 3-4 confirm this: The path through the valley is also one of the paths of righteousness in which God leads.

But why would a good shepherd who would lay down his life for his sheep lead a lamb into a valley filled with danger and death threats? There's only one possible answer: To get to some better place. The shepherd is aware of the dangerous terrain and predators that threaten ahead. He lovingly leads his sheep through the uncertainty to a more desirable location.

When you're walking through some unfamiliar valley and the shadows linger ...

When you have cancer and have to decide whether it will be chemotherapy or some other way ...

When you're trying to decide as a matter of godly stewardship whether to take your money out of the market or let it ride ...

When your finances are tight, and you are taking on yet another job to make ends meet ...

When you face these circumstances and more, remember this: Your Shepherd has appointed even the hard times as one of His paths of righteousness. He is leading you through this valley for reasons that probably won't be apparent. But rest assured, He is taking you to the high country, where the sun is warm and the grass is lush. Every valley is a pathway to something better. As Psalm 84:11 says, "For the LORD God is a sun and shield. The LORD grants favor and honor; he does not withhold the good from those who live with integrity." Or as Paul put it, "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). The valley isn't good, but the Shepherd is. He knows the way.

SESSION 4

OUR RESPONSE

PSALM 138:1-8

- 1** I will give you **A thanks** with all my heart;
I will sing your praise before the **B heavenly beings**.
- 2** I will bow down toward your holy temple
and give thanks to your **C name**
for your constant love and truth.
You have exalted your name
and your promise above everything else.
- 3** On the day I called, you answered me;
you **D increased strength** within me.
- 4** All the **E kings on earth** will give you thanks, LORD,
when they hear what you have promised.
- 5** They will sing of **F the LORD's ways**,
for **G the LORD's glory** is great.
- 6** Though the LORD is exalted,
he takes note of the **H humble**;
but he knows the **I haughty** from a distance.
- 7** If I walk into the thick of danger,
you will preserve my life
from the anger of my enemies.
You will extend your hand;
J your right hand will save me.
- 8** The LORD will **K fulfill his purpose for me**.
LORD, your faithful love **L endures forever**;
do not abandon **M the work of your hands**.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** An expression of gratitude to God; "Give thanks in everything; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess. 5:18).
- b** The gods of others; angelic pagan deities; idols
- c** The truth of God's character is focused in His name. The divine name reveals God's power, authority, and holiness. The Ten Commandments prohibit the violation of God's name (Ex. 20:7).
- d** "[Renewed] strength in my life" (AMP)
- e** Those who worship the gods referred to in verse 1. God has sovereignty over any earthly kingdom.
- f** God's provision, care, and instruction to His people
- g** God's glory is established by His presence and character. Psalm 145:7 says, "They will give a testimony of your great goodness and will joyfully sing of your righteousness."
- h** This doesn't necessarily mean that the humble receive special favor from God. However, God sees the obscure and unknown. God takes note of those who recognize their need for Him.
- i** Proud; a person who thinks God needs him
- j** While God extends His left hand to hold off and protect, He extends His right hand to save and deliver.
- k** "Work out his plans for my life" (NLT); "accomplish what concerns me" (NASB)
- l** God's love is unchanging and consistent, "everlasting" (NASB).
- m** God made him and valued him.

1. I WILL THANK (Ps. 138:1-3)

- The psalmist (David) declared His thankfulness to God for His love, truth, and answered prayer.
- David committed to sing and bow in thankful worship.

2. THEY WILL BOW (Ps. 138:4-6)

- David proclaimed that all kingdoms of the earth ultimately will recognize God as sovereign.
- David reminded his readers of God's recognition of the humble and the arrogant.

3. GOD WILL FULFILL (Ps. 138:7-8)

- David affirmed his confidence in God's love, omniscience, and power to fulfill His purposes for David.

» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

Thanksgiving is the proper response to God's answer to our prayers.

- Believers should joyfully give thanks to God for what He does, including answering prayer.
- Everyone ultimately will recognize God's sovereignty, some out of thankfulness and others out of fear.
- Believers can rely on God's power to fulfill His purposes in their lives.



FOCUS ATTENTION

What's the best thank-you you've ever received?

- Taking time to thank others has power to unite, cultivate closeness, harvest goodness, and feed generosity.
- When a thank-you is fake or condescending, it can create division and anger.
- Believers need to take time to properly thank God for all He has done for us.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE PSALM 138:1-3

What actions did the psalmist take to thank the Lord in verses 1-3? How does thanksgiving include more than talk?

- Psalm 138 is a Thanksgiving psalm.
- The psalmist (David, in this case) decided ("I will") to give thanks with all his heart. He sang, bowed, and called on God.
- Lead the group to discuss what makes thanksgiving sincere or fake, unifying or dividing, and so on.

In verses 1-8, for what actions of God did the psalmist give thanks? How do these cultivate love for and trust in God?

- The actions of God included constant love, constant truth, answering, increasing strength, noting the humble, recognizing haughtiness, helping with anger from enemies, extending His hand, fulfilling His purpose, and eternal loving.
- God helps us learn to trust Him.

What is the result of expressing our thanks to others? To God?

- Psalm 138:1-3 seems to indicate that being thankful is a matter of willingness.
- Point out the number of "I will" phrases.
- Often joy comes *after* doing what's loving.
- Memorize Psalm 138:1, underlining "I will" and other key phrases in your Bible.

PSALM 138:4-6

Which is a better motivator of thankfulness to God: love or fear? Why? Why did David believe kings would thank the Lord?

- Some kings would be prompted out of thankfulness for the Lord's promises, ways, or greatness (v. 4), and others would give thanks out of fear for God's recognition of their haughtiness and for their own failure to recognize the humble (v. 5).
- Ultimately everyone will recognize God (Rom. 14:11; Rev. 11:15).

Why does it matter that we have a thankful attitude? Why does thankfulness matter to God?

- We can thank God for His character as well as for His actions. This gives us the freedom to thank Him even when we don't see evidence of His actions.
- Sadly, sometimes our thanks might be self-focused rather than God-focused. God sees through our arrogant or haughty attitudes.

PSALM 138:7-8

Based on these verses, what did David understand about God's character? Give examples of choices you might make based on these realities.

- David was aware of danger, anger, and obstacles.
- David affirmed his confidence in God's love, omniscience, and ability to fulfill His purposes no matter what.
- Obeying God becomes more probable and joyful when we know God's true character.
- What we believe about God shapes how much we let Him guide us.

How has God's extended hand (v. 7) equipped you to manage danger, anger, or unexpected obstacles?

How can we work for God's purposes despite setbacks?

- God will give the know-how and power to follow Him no matter what comes.
- God is very practical and will use many means to help us fulfill our purposes for Him.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

Even though we adore God, sometimes we just don't show thankfulness. How can we express joyful thanks to God when we feel grumpy, entitled, frustrated, or otherwise unthankful?

- Believers know the "church answers," but still struggle to choose thankfulness. Put this on the table to let the group help one another.
- Like David, we can choose "I will" (vv. 1-2) with such actions as naming elements to be thankful for even amidst the junk, talking to God about our frustrations and knowing He's been there, or by taking "every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5).
- We give thanks to God not for everything, but "in everything" (1 Thess. 5:18). This can only be done through the power of God's Spirit.
- **Personal Challenge:** Create a habit that will ensure regular thankfulness to God. Will it be a dialogue with Him while taking your shower, a calendar reminder, or something else? Work together with the group to generate ideas.

OBJECT LESSON

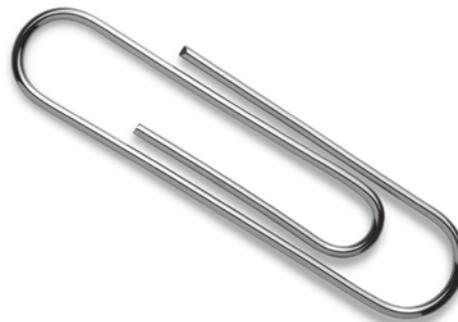
A PAPER CLIP

Pass around a large paper clip and let each group member bend it in a different way. Suggest that thankfulness shapes our character even when life bends us. Say: *This paper clip represents our life. We might be shaped in ways we didn't anticipate, but we'll end up better liking the person we become as God works in and through us.*

Read Psalm 138:1-3 to find the choices the psalmist made that shaped his actions and attitudes. Ask: *How would these choices shape a person's character and attitude?*

Collect the paper clip, and reshape it to look like a person bowing. Say: *David made a key choice to bow before God. He was also convinced that all kings would eventually bow before God. Some would do this from gratefulness and others from fear. Ask: Where do you see these attitudes in Psalm 138:4-5? What other options do you see? In what ways is bowing actually freeing?*

Once again take the paper clip and put it back to its original shape. Use it to clip some papers, to flip the pages of your Bible, or to otherwise perform a practical function. Explain: *Still another reason to thank God is that He equips us to fulfill our purposes.*



Read Psalm 139:7-8 to see the practicality of God's help for us. Call for volunteers to name ways God has shown them what to do during a dangerous or angry time, and how this fulfilled their purposes as human beings.

Close in prayer, thanking God for His practical help, for His seeing how people really are, for guiding all to see, and for loving us.

DIG DEEPER

THANKSGIVING

The act of thanksgiving is one's expression of gratitude directed toward God, typically in response to His actions on behalf of His people. Thanksgiving was central to Old Testament worship.

God commanded His people to make sacrifices and offerings: "I will sacrifice a freewill offering to you. I will praise your name, Lord, because it is good. For he has rescued me from every trouble, and my eye has looked down on my enemies" (Ps. 54:6-7). The psalmist valued a song of thanksgiving more than sacrifice: "I will praise God's name with song and exalt him with thanksgiving" (Ps. 69:30). David employed Levites "to give thanks and praise to him" (1 Chron. 16:4; also 23:30; Neh. 12:46).

Pilgrimage to the temple and temple worship were characterized by thanksgiving: "Let us enter his presence with thanksgiving; let us shout triumphantly to him in song" (Ps. 95:2). Thanksgiving was expressed for personal (Ps. 35:18) and national deliverance (Ps. 44:7-8); for God's faithfulness to the covenant (Ps. 100:5); and for forgiveness of sin (Ps. 30:4-5; Isa. 12:1).

All of creation joins in offering thanks to God: "All you have made will thank you, Lord; the faithful will bless you" (Ps. 145:10).

Thanksgiving is a natural element in Christian worship (1 Cor. 14:16-17) and is meant to characterize all of the Christian life (Col. 2:7; 4:2). Early Christians expressed thanks for Christ's healing ministry (Luke 17:16); for Christ's deliverance of believers from sin (Rom. 6:17-18; 7:25); for God's indescribable gift of grace in Christ (2 Cor. 9:14-15; 1 Cor. 15:57); and for the faith of other Christians (Rom. 1:8).¹

As Christians today discover and live out God's purposes, they experience success when they understand the power of thanksgiving. Colossians 3:17 says, "And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father ..." First Thessalonians 5:18 adds, "give thanks in everything; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

1. Adapted from "Thanksgiving," *Holman Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman, 1991), 1336; Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991.

SESSION 5

HIS PRESENCE

PSALM 84:1-12

- ¹ How lovely is your **A dwelling place**,
B LORD of Armies.
² I long and yearn
for the **C courts of the LORD**;
my **D heart and flesh E cry out** for the **F living God**.
³ Even a **G sparrow** finds a home,
and a **G swallow**, a nest for herself
where she places her young—
near your altars, LORD of Armies,
my King and my God.
⁴ How **H happy** are those who reside in your house,
who praise you continually.
⁵ Happy are the people whose strength is in you,
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.
⁶ As they pass through the **I Valley of Baca**,
they make it a source of spring water;
even the autumn rain will cover it with blessings.
⁷ They go from strength to strength;
each appears before God in Zion.
⁸ LORD God of Armies, hear my prayer;
listen, God of Jacob.
⁹ Consider our **J shield**, God;
look on the face of your anointed one.
¹⁰ Better a day in your courts
than a thousand anywhere else.
I would rather stand at the **K threshold** of the house of my
God than live in the **L tents of wicked people**.
¹¹ For the LORD God is a **M sun and shield**.
The LORD grants favor and honor;
he does not withhold the good
from those who live with **N integrity**.
¹² Happy is the person who trusts in you, LORD of Armies!

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** The temple complex Solomon built in Jerusalem. God's dwelling place highlights both His transcendence and imminence.
- b** This title designates God as the Lord of the armies of Israel. In Hebrew, His title is *Yahweh Sabaoth*, which is revealed in Scripture that He is the God of the armies of earth, of the stars, of the unseen angels, and even all of these in one.
- c** The place where the Lord lives and serves His people
- d** Humankind's whole being, body and soul
- e** Shout for joy; yearns; desires
- f** God is and will always be alive, and He also makes everything else alive.
- g** Small birds that make their nests in houses or under eaves as opposed to birds that nest in trees and foliage
- h** "What joy" (NLT); "blessed" (NASB, KJV, ESV); "Blessed and greatly favored" (AMP)
- i** "Valley of Weeping" (AMP, NLT); The Valley of Baca was along the path worshipers took to the temple. Here those on pilgrimage are forced to go through a time of weeping in which God turned their tears into a well, providing water.
- j** A reference to the king who protects the people from their enemies (also used in v. 11)
- k** The person at the door would have been a menial servant in the house of God.
- l** A resident in the dwelling places of wickedness
- m** The sun provides light and warmth, while the shield gives protection and providence.
- n** To do what is right; to live uprightly; Proverbs 2:7 says, "He stores up success for the upright; He is a shield for those who live with integrity."

1. THE PASSION (Ps. 84:1-4)

- The psalmist (sons of Korah) expressed his desire to be in the temple.
- He explained that the purpose of the temple is for the worship of God, which is what the psalmist wanted to do above all else.
- Note: Carefully affirm the value of a place of worship without compromising New Testament teachings (ex: 1 Cor. 3; Acts 17).

2. THE PRIORITY (Ps. 84:5-7)

- The psalmist recognized the value of making a pilgrimage to the temple.
- He characterized the trip as having difficulties and hardships, but also as energizing to those making the journey, because they knew the joy of worship awaited them.

3. THE PRAYER (Ps. 84:8-9)

- The psalmist called on God to look with favor on the king, who was God's anointed leader responsible for the guidance and protection of God's people.

4. THE PRESENCE (Ps. 84:10-12)

- The psalmist declared the joy of being in God's presence, even if that was in an outer court.
- He characterized God as being good and trustworthy.

» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

Security is found in the assurance of God's presence.

- Believers are to passionately worship God in light of His blessings on His people.
- God offers strength for life to those who seek to worship Him.
- Believers are to pray for their leaders and for God's direction as they lead.
- Believers are to respond to God's presence with worship and praise.



FOCUS ATTENTION

Name some items that must operate together in pairs, such as “me and my shadow.”

- Lead the group to discuss how life with God is like one of these pairs. If it’s not mentioned, suggest freedom and security. Then discuss how freedom and security go hand-in-hand with God.
- As believers, we find our ultimate security in knowing we have God’s presence with us at all times.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE PSALM 84:1-4

Find descriptors in these verses of what it’s like to be in God’s presence.

- Being near God is “lovely” (v. 1), similar to being near royalty, worth crying out for, feels like home, indicates being cared for, is like residing in a house, and more.
- The mother bird is one of many Bible illustrations about how God acts and why.

Psalm 84 is a royal prayer for God’s presence. What is the role of a particular place in feeling close to God? In being close to God?

- Carefully affirm the value of a place of worship without limiting God’s presence to one place (see John 4:21-24; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; Acts 17:27-28).
- The psalmists (sons of Korah) expressed their desire to be in the temple. Though we are called to worship everyday and in all locations (Deut. 6:4-9; Rom. 12:1-2), these psalmists particularly yearned for the temple.

Psalm 84 is a royal psalm, addressing God as King. What do you appreciate about God as your king?

- Believers passionately worship God in light of His blessings on His people.

PSALM 84:5-7

Finding strength in God is not a sign of weakness but instead is our source of happiness. Why?

- The psalmists valued making a pilgrimage to the temple.
- This trip had difficulties (“Valley of Tears”), but energized those making the journey.

How would you explain to a child how to go “from strength to strength” (v. 7)? How do strong decisions and actions encourage further strong decisions and actions? Why?

- Drawing upon God’s strength for life is a way to worship Him.
- This passage uses plurals (“people,” “they”). Our individual actions add to or detract from the God-based happiness of others, and theirs adds to or detracts from ours.

PSALM 84:8-9

How does God work through leaders? What is our responsibility to our leaders?

- The psalmists called on God to look with favor on the king, His “anointed one” (v. 9).
- The king was responsible for guiding and protecting people.
- Believers are responsible for praying for their leaders.
- A royal psalm, like this one, may include an oracle or prayer for the human king (see Ps. 72).

PSALM 84:10-12

Why do you suppose Psalm 84:10 is so favored and frequently repeated?

- Other translations add these insights: “I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God” (ESV, NIV) ... “than live the good life in the homes of the wicked” (NLT).
- “I’d rather scrub floors in the house of my God than be honored as a guest in the palace of sin” (MSG).
- God makes His abode within believers (John 14:15-18,27; 1 Cor. 6:19).

The psalmist declared the joy of being in God’s presence even in an outer court. Why is being near God so valuable?

- God is good and trustworthy. Being near Him equips us to have those characteristics also.
- John 1:14 declares, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”
- Later John heard a voice from the throne saying, “Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look, God’s dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God” (Rev. 21:3).

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

We worship and praise in response to God’s presence. How would you describe these actions to someone new to the faith?

- Urge group members to build on what this passage has taught them about worship and praise.
- Choose a phrase from Psalm 84 that expresses your delight in God’s presence, and discuss why.
- **Personal Challenge:** Return to the concept of you and your shadow. Work to become so aware of God’s presence each day that it’s impossible for you to conceive of doing anything without God.

OBJECT LESSON

A HOOK-AND-LOOP CLOSURE

Pass around a hook-and-loop closure. Direct group members to name characteristics of the fuzzy (loop) side, and then characteristics of the prickly (hook) side. Use their listed characteristics to articulate that attaching ourselves to God equips us to decrease our prickliness and increase our goodness.

Read Psalm 84:1-4. Ask: *What phrases describe the psalmists' passion for connecting with God?* Read Psalm 84:5-7. Call for volunteers to tell a way they attach their lives to God. Emphasize the phrase "strength to strength" (Ps. 84:7). State: *We need God's strength repeatedly as we walk through this life.* Use the hook-and-loop strips to illustrate how you go from strength to strength. (For example, the strong decision to ___ has fed the next decision similar to the way this row of hooks connects to the next.)

Put the hook-and-loop strips together as you transition: *Kings also need to attach themselves to God.* Read Psalm 84:8-9 for guidance on how to pray for a leader. Highlight the respect with which the psalmists approached God. Ask: *What's good about hook and loop closures?* Examples include that even small children can attach



their shoes with it and adults can use it to keep a child's toy from falling from a car seat. Compare each to what's good about time with God according to Psalm 84:10-12. Emphasize: *God is good and trustworthy. Our worship in church and elsewhere should be focused on His qualities.*

DIG DEEPER

AT HOME WITH GOD

Alben William Barkley (1877–1956) was a lawyer from Kentucky who served as the 35th Vice President of the United States from 1949 to 1953 under Harry S. Truman. After his vice-presidency, Barkley remained a popular speaker and began working on his memoirs. Re-entering politics in 1954, Barkley challenged the incumbent Republican Senator John Sherman Cooper. He won the general election, resulting in a Democratic advantage in the Senate.

It's said that Harry Kilgore, the West Virginia Senator, offered to exchange seats with Barkley, which would have allowed Barkley a seat on the front row of the Senate with the chamber's senior members and put Kilgore in the back with the newest legislators. However, Barkley declined Kilgore's offer.

In a keynote address in Washington on April 30, 1956, Barkley spoke of his willingness to sit with the other freshman senators in Congress. According to a later biography by Mark O. Hatfield and the Senate Historical Office, Barkley ended his speech by alluding to Psalm 84:10: "I'm glad to sit on the back row, for I would rather be a servant in the House of the Lord than to sit in the seats of the mighty."¹ While still on stage, he then collapsed from a massive heart attack and died.

While we can only speculate on the exact interpretation of Barkley's words, Christians can voice words similar to that of the psalmist and Barkley that one day spent in the most lowly service in God's presence is better than a thousand days anyplace else.

Christians often love their church buildings, worship services, and fellowship with other believers. Sacred spots and moments in time are treasures in the human experience. Christians associate God with the places and times when He has been most real in their experience. They do not worship the place or time but God, whom they encountered there. At those times, they are at home with God.

Blessed, indeed, are those who trust in the Lord (Ps. 84:12). Those who serve in the church and those who worship there are blessed. But so is everyone who loves and lives for God.

1. Mark O. Hatfield, with the Senate Historical Office, "Vice Presidents of the United States Alben W. Barkley (1949-1953)" in *Vice Presidents of the United States, 1789-1993* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997), 6.

SESSION 6

THE CREATOR

PSALM 95:1-11

- ¹ Come, let us shout joyfully to the LORD,
shout triumphantly to the **A rock of our salvation!**
- ² Let us **B enter his presence** with thanksgiving;
let us shout triumphantly to him in song.
- ³ For the LORD is a great God,
a great King **C above all gods.**
- ⁴ The **D depths of the earth** are in his hand,
and the **E mountain peaks** are his.
- ⁵ The sea is his; he made it.
His hands formed the **F dry land.**
- ⁶ Come, let us **G worship and bow down**;
let us **H kneel** before the LORD our Maker.
- ⁷ For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
the **I sheep under his care.**
Today, if you hear his voice:
- ⁸ Do not harden your hearts as at **J Meribah**,
as on that day at **K Massah** in the wilderness
- ⁹ where your fathers tested me;
they tried me, though they had seen what I did.
- ¹⁰ For forty years I was disgusted with that generation;
I said, “They are a people whose hearts go astray;
they do not know my ways.”
- ¹¹ So I swore in my anger,
“They will not enter **L my rest.**”

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** A reminder of God’s role as Protector in saving His people from evil sources
- b** A call to worship; an invitation to come before the Lord physically as they entered the sanctuary and spiritually as they came into God’s holy presence
- c** In the Hebrew, *’elohiym*, God’s name here suggests the mystery of the Creator, and His absolute, infinite Lordship over creation.
- d** The innermost recesses of God’s creation; the lowest points on the vertical range of God’s creation
- e** The highest places in God’s creation; the highest points on the vertical range of God’s creation
- f** The vast parts of God’s creation covered by land; along with seas, the horizontal range of God’s creation
- g** Bowing during worship was a sign of devotion; worshipers were to prostrate themselves face down upon the floor; a symbol of complete homage
- h** Normally, Jews stood to pray.
- i** Believers are the sheep of His hand, His own creation to guide and protect (also see Ps. 23:1-4).
- j** To strive with, contend, find fault with
- k** A place name meaning to test or try; Massah was a stopping place during the wilderness wandering near the base of Mt. Horeb (Sinai). Moses gave the name in response to the people’s desire to put God to the test by demanding water during their time in the wilderness (Ex. 17:7).
- l** The “land of promise” (AMP); “never be able to sit down and rest see” (MSG; also Num. 14:20-23).

1. WHAT (Ps. 95:1-2)

- The psalmist called for everyone to offer celebratory worship to God.

2. WHO (Ps. 95:3-5)

- The psalmist highlighted God as the great King and Creator, motivating the people to worship Him.

3. HOW (Ps. 95:6-7a)

- The psalmist directed all of creation to approach God with humility and reverence, bowing before Him.
- He used the metaphor of sheep in His pasture to reiterate God as the Creator.
- Note: Affirm various postures for worshipping God, with bowing and kneeling being appropriate expressions of humility before Him.

4. WHEN (Ps. 95:7b-11)

- The psalmist warned his readers about ignoring God and failing to worship Him, pointing to past failures in Israel's history as illustrations.
- Note: Interpret entering into His rest in terms of enjoying the fullness of God's blessing. Point to Hebrews 4.

» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

Believers should worship God above all else because He is sovereign.

- All of creation should celebrate its Creator.
- God should be worshiped as our Creator.
- All people should approach worship of the Creator with humility and reverence.
- Believers must consistently worship God, corporately and privately.



FOCUS ATTENTION

How can you tell who or what a person worships?

When might we worship ourselves?

- Worship is much more than the time during Sunday services.
- Our behavior during the other hours of the week tells who or what we worship.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

PSALM 95:1-2

How does verse 1 free you to sing to God whether you think you sing well or poorly?

- Singing in the Bible is not a talent for a few but a command for all people.
- Psalm 95 is an enthronement psalm, which means it celebrates God's kingship.

What might shouting joyfully to the Lord look like in corporate worship? In your home? In your car?

- Singing and shouting to God without right actions is not worship: In Amos 5:23-24, God said to take away the noise of songs because those worshipping God defrauded the poor. God called for justice to roll down.
- Jesus said some worshiped Him with their lips but their hearts were far from Him (Matt. 15:8).

Singing and shouting are two ways to express worship to God. Find other expressions in Psalm 95. How could each happen during a corporate worship service? During the rest of the week?

- Worship actions in Psalm 95 include singing, shouting, entering His presence, thanksgiving, recognizing His greatness, recognizing His power, acknowledging He owns the earth, bowing down, kneeling, being His people, softening our hearts, refusing to try God, not disgusting God, keeping our hearts from going astray, and knowing His ways.
- Believers must worship God 24/7. Otherwise the corporate time means little or nothing (see Mic. 6:6-12 and Ps. 95:8-10).

PSALM 95:3-5

God created you. How does that motivate you to worship Him? What else motivates worship of God?

- The psalmist highlighted God as the great King and Creator.
- As our Creator, God knows our hearts and sees our actions and motivations infinitely more than we could ever understand.

What if gratefulness, awe, and other worship feelings do not arise? How is worship more than a feeling? How is obedience an act of worship?

- The psalmist invites worship with "come," "let us," and "for," followed by directed actions. Worship is more about obedience than a particular feeling.

- When we notice we're worshipping something else, including our own opinion, we must deliberately redirect our affection to God, who is more trustworthy. God's Spirit equips us for this.

PSALM 95:6-7a

What are ways to kneel to God even without physically kneeling? What are ways to disrespect God even when physically kneeling?

- Other postures can also appropriately worship God.
- An upright heart is an important posture (1 Kings 9:4; Ps. 64:10).

What do you appreciate about being one of God's sheep? What do you know about sheep that keeps you from worshipping yourself or another person?

- The metaphor of sheep in His pasture reiterates God as Creator.
- The psalmist directed all of creation to approach God with humility and respect.

PSALM 95:7b-11

Why is it so hard for us to maintain humility? What makes hardheartedness appealing?

- Discuss regular actions that help us please God and not disgust Him.
- Discuss repeated actions that guide us closer to God.

How do we enter into God's rest? What blocks us from entering His rest?

- Entering God's rest means to enjoy the fullness of God's blessing this very day.
- Read Hebrews 4 for more insight into Psalm 95:11.
- Genesis 2:2 and 2 Chronicles 6:41-42 discuss God's rest.
- The psalmist warned his readers about ignoring God, citing past failures in Israel's history.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

People were created to thoroughly worship God. What evidence do you see of this foundational need?

- We all worship something.
- The Spirit motivates believers to worship God through the fruits of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-3). These are obedient actions, not feelings.
- Notice that the fruits of the Spirit are missing when a person worships self or possessions.
- **Personal Challenge:** In an effort to focus on worshipping God daily, write each fruit of the Spirit separately on note cards and rotate the front card to the back every day. Note how the Spirit enables you to express the fruit of the day in devotion to your God.

TWO MAGNETS

Display two magnets. Explain: *Magnetism is a consistent, reliable force in this world. We can't wish magnetism away or pretend it won't create effects. Similarly, God is real and reliable. Even when we try to ignore Him, He still generates goodness. Psalm 95:1-2 shows how to wisely respond to this force who is God: we worship Him. Emphasize: The creator of an electromagnet uses physics to introduce magnetic force to the object. However, God created everything out of nothing.*

Read Psalm 95:3-5, highlighting motivations to worship the God who created us. Ask: *Why might someone behave in ways contrary to the way God created them? Can an electromagnet work independently? Can people? When, why, and how effectively?*

Take turns flipping the two magnet poles so they attract and then repel. Explain that magnets are super fun and bring adventures you won't want to miss. Read Psalm 95:6-7a. Ask: *How is life with God adventurous? Not to be missed? What else is life with God?*

Turn like poles together to push one magnet around the table with another. Explain that true worship shows us what to repel as well as what to attract. Challenge the group to search Psalm 95:7b-11



for what to repel and what to attract. Amos 5:23-24 shows that when we truly worship God we push away injustice, dishonesty, and other sins. We attract love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Repeat that worship is a daily way to manage the pushes and pulls of life, a way to lean in toward the forces that are real and godly.

DIG DEEPER

WORTHY OF WORSHIP

Terry W. York has published more than 40 hymns and more than 60 choral anthem texts. One of his most beloved hymn texts is *Worthy of Worship*. Note: Words to the hymn are available online and in *The Baptist Hymnal* (Hymn 3). The hymn calls us to consider who God is and why He deserves our reverent honor as we sing of His roles in our lives.

Creator: "Our Lord and God, you are worthy to receive glory and honor and power, because you have created all things, and by your will they exist and were created" (Rev. 4:11).

Savior: "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity" (2 Pet. 3:18).

Sustainer: "I lie down and sleep; I wake again because the LORD sustains me" (Ps. 3:5).

Almighty Father: "And I will be a Father to you, and you will be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:18).

Master and Lord: "For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11).

King of all kings: "And he has a name written on his robe and on his thigh: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:16).

Redeemer: "Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

Wonderful Counselor: "For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6).

Comforter: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" (2 Cor. 1:3).

Friend: "The LORD would speak with Moses face to face, just as a man speaks with his friend, then Moses would return to the camp. His assistant, the young man Joshua son of Nun, would not leave the inside of the tent" (Ex. 33:11a).

SESSION 7

GOD REVEALED

PSALM 19:1-14

¹ The **a heavens** declare the glory of God, and the expanse proclaims the work of his hands. ² Day after day they pour out speech; night after night they communicate knowledge. ³ There is no speech; there are **b no words**; their voice is not heard. ⁴ Their message has gone out to the whole earth, and their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens he has pitched a **c tent for the sun**. ⁵ It is like a **d bridegroom** coming from his home; it rejoices like an **e athlete** running a course. ⁶ It rises from one end of the heavens and circles to their other end; nothing is hidden from its heat. ⁷ The instruction of the LORD is perfect, renewing one's life; the **f testimony of the LORD** is trustworthy, making the inexperienced wise. ⁸ The **g precepts of the LORD** are right, making the heart glad; the command of the LORD is radiant, making the eyes light up. ⁹ The **h fear of the LORD** is pure, enduring forever; the **i ordinances of the LORD** are reliable and altogether righteous. ¹⁰ They are more desirable than gold—than an abundance of pure gold; and sweeter than honey dripping from a **j honeycomb**. ¹¹ In addition, your servant is warned by them, and in keeping them there is an abundant reward. ¹² Who perceives his unintentional sins? Cleanse me from my **k hidden faults**. ¹³ Moreover, keep your servant from willful sins; do not let them rule me. Then I will be blameless and cleansed from **l blatant rebellion**. ¹⁴ May the words of my mouth and the **m meditation of my heart** be acceptable to you, LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** The splendor of all that appears above the earth including stars and planets at night and clouds and light during the day
- b** The magnificence of creation cannot be explained with words.
- c** The brightest star in creation has a permanent home in heaven.
- d** The groom is filled with radiant joy the day after he gets married.
- e** An eager, ready participant who is ready to demonstrate his strength and endurance
- f** The declaration of truth from God. Exodus 25:16 named the tablets of Ten Commandments “the testimony” given to His people. The Message says, “The revelation of God is whole and pulls our lives together.”
- g** Godly orders or principles prescribing conduct
- h** Respect and reverence for God
- i** An authoritative rule, law, decree, or command from God; “judgments” (KJV, NASB)
- j** A valued commodity in ancient times
- k** “Unconscious, unintended” (AMP). Our accidental, inadvertent behavior that we don’t recognize as sin. Job 34:32 says, “Teach me what I cannot see; if I have done wrong, I won’t do it again.”
- l** Our premeditated, disobedient behavior; “anything wrong willfully and defiantly” (Num. 15:30)
- m** Our thoughts, attitudes, motives, and values are revealed in the heart.

1. SEEN IN CREATION (Ps. 19:1-6)

- The psalmist (David) celebrated ways God is revealed in creation.
- The wonders in the heavens and the rising and setting of the sun reminded the psalmist of God’s omniscience and awe-inspiring glory.
- Note: Be careful not to call into question Scripture’s inerrant nature when discussing poetic descriptions such as the sun’s rising and setting. Emphasize and explain that general revelation provides enough revelation to condemn, but not enough to save.

2. SEEN IN HIS WORD (Ps. 19:7-11)

- David portrayed God’s Word as trustworthy, always reliable, and to be treasured.
- David explained that God’s Word contained the warnings needed to live a God-honoring life.
- Note: Emphasize the completeness of God’s revealed Word.

3. CELEBRATED IN HIS PEOPLE (Ps. 19:12-14)

- David emphasized that through God’s Word, one finds cleansing and freedom from sin.
- Note: Emphasize that Jesus is the Word that provides cleansing and freedom.

» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

God reveals Himself through His creation and His Word.

- All people are accountable to God since He reveals Himself through His creation.
- Believers should treasure God’s written Word.
- Forgiveness and freedom from sin is found through faith in the Word, Jesus.



FOCUS ATTENTION

What is your favorite part of being outside? In what do you find the most joy?

- God reveals Himself to us through His creation. We see such qualities as intentionality, orderliness, inventiveness, beauty, goodness, cleverness, uniqueness, steadiness and more. What do we know about our God who created both horses and zebras, babies and adults?
- God reveals Himself more specifically through His Word, the Bible.
- God reveals Himself most specifically through Jesus Christ (John 1:14).

EXPLORE THE BIBLE PSALM 19:1-6

What do the heavens and sky proclaim about God? What do you learn from the sun and the stars day after day about God?

- The heavens declare the glory of God—the visible representation of the invisible.
- They also declare the work of God’s hands, communicate knowledge even without words, and more.
- All people are accountable to God since He reveals Himself through His creation.

What do the images in verses 4-6 teach you about God?

- Consider one image at a time, or let group members expound on their favorites. For example, “nothing is hidden” (v. 6) shows God always knows (omniscience).
- The psalmist (David, in this case) celebrated ways God reveals Himself in creation.
- God created nature. Nature is not God, so there is never a place to worship it.
- Psalm 19 is a hymn. Hymn psalms are uniquely liturgical and normally include a call to praise God and why we should praise Him.
- Memorize Psalm 19:1 by setting it to a hymn tune.

PSALM 19:7-11

What are characteristics of God’s teaching according to verses 7-11, and why is each important? What are the rewards in keeping God’s teaching?

- God showing His character and work through nature is called general revelation.
- God showing His character and work through the Bible is called specific revelation. The psalmist shifts to this specific revelation in verses 7-11.
- God’s teaching is “perfect” (v. 7); renews life (v. 7); “is trustworthy” (v. 7); makes “the inexperienced wise” (v. 7);

is “right” (v. 8); makes “the heart glad” (v. 8); “is radiant” (v. 8); makes “the eyes light up” (v. 8); is “reliable” (v. 9); is “altogether righteous” (v. 9); is “more desirable than gold” (v. 10); is “sweeter than honey” (v. 10); warns us (v. 11).

- Share examples of how God’s Word has brought these into our lives.

How does each term used for God’s teaching show you what it’s like to learn from God? How does your life show that you treasure God’s Word?

- Words used for God’s teaching include “instruction” (v. 7); “testimony” (v. 7); “precepts” (v. 8); “command” (v. 8); and “ordinances” (v. 9).
- David explained that God’s Word contains the warnings needed to live life.
- God’s Word is complete.

PSALM 19:12-14

How do we deceive ourselves about our unintentional sins? How do we deceive ourselves with intentional (willful) sins?

- Both intentional and unintentional sins rule over us.
- We think we choose freedom when we choose sin. Yet the result is always bondage to sin. The only true freedom is found in Christ.

What in our behavior shows that we want to be innocent? What in our behavior shows that we willingly do wrong and then try to defend or hide it? Why, deep down in our heart of hearts, do we want freedom from this whole sin mess?

- David taught that through God’s Word, we find cleansing and freedom.
- Forgiveness and freedom from sin is found through faith in the Living Word, Jesus Christ (John 1:1-4).

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

Let’s pray together the words of Psalm 19:14. How can Psalm 19:14 serve as a daily prayer?

- God’s Spirit will help us control our words, before they exit our mouth. John 14–16 gives insights into how the Spirit works.
- We can’t control what thoughts enter our minds, but we can control what thoughts we entertain or eject.
- Our words and our hearts determine the actions we choose. Brainstorm examples of this.
- **Personal Challenge:** At each meal for the next 30 days pray Psalm 19:14 and watch for the ways God answers.

OBJECT LESSON

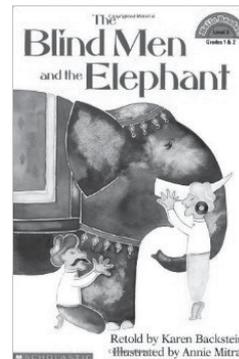
A COPY OF THE FOLKTALE “THE BLIND MEN AND THE ELEPHANT”

Prepare to tell the folktale about the six blind men (or men in the dark) attempting to describe an elephant. This story is readily available on the Internet or in children’s bookstores. Tell about or read the story.

Explain: *The men needed the big picture to truly understand the nature and work of an elephant. The features matter most particularly in relation to the elephant as a whole. Similarly, we need the big picture of God to understand, and work in harmony with His nature and work.*

Point the group to Psalm 19:1-6 to find what God has revealed about Himself through nature. Call for the group to name a verse and what it teaches about God. Hold up the folktale, and ask: *How does knowing some characteristics about a person, animal, or thing help us understand it more completely?* (For example, “knowledge” (v. 1) helps us grasp “glory” (v. 2).)

Move to Psalm 19:7-11. Recall that these verses teach us about the specific revelation of God’s Word. Again ask: *Compare two features of God’s Word and how, together, they give a more complete*



picture of God. (For example, “instruction” “renews one’s life” (v. 7) because it “makes the heart glad” (v. 8).)

Read Psalm 19:12-14. Close by discussing ways to live out what we learn from God in both general revelation (creation) and specific revelation (the Bible). Ask: *How can we let our words and heart be acceptable to God?*

DIG DEEPER

REVELATION OF GOD

All knowledge of God comes by way of revelation. Human knowledge of God is revealed knowledge, since God alone gives it. He bridges the gap between Himself and His creatures, disclosing Himself and His will to them. By God alone can God be known.

The Bible distinguishes two ways of knowing God: general and special revelation. Each of these two ways is expressed in Psalm 19. The first six verses contain God’s glory revealed in creation (general revelation). The remainder of the psalm contains God’s glory revealed in His Word (special revelation).

General revelation is universal in the sense that it is God’s self-disclosure of Himself in a general way to all people at all times in all places. General revelation occurs through nature, human experience, and in history. In the wonders of the heavens and in the beauty of the earth, God manifests Himself. Jesus taught that God “causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matt. 5:45), thus revealing His goodness to all. “The living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them ... did not leave himself without a witness, since he did what is good by giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons and filling you with food and your hearts with joy” (Acts 14:15-17). God makes Himself known through the continuing care

and provision for humankind. Thus the psalmist in Psalm 19 could declare God’s glory revealed in creation.

Special revelation is available to specific people at specific times in specific places, it is available now only by consultation of sacred Scripture. At the time Psalm 19 was composed, God revealed Himself to His people through His Word: the Law (Ten Commandments) and the prophets. “Long ago God spoke to the fathers by the prophets at different times and in different ways” (Heb. 1:1). The fixed center of special revelation is Jesus Christ, the ultimate point of God’s personal revelation. “In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. God has appointed him heir of all things and made the universe through him. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact expression of his nature, sustaining all things by his powerful word” (Heb. 1:2-3). Thus before God’s center of special revelation occurred, the psalmist in Psalm 19 could declare God’s glory revealed in His Word.¹

1. Adapted from “Revelation of God,” *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2003), 1383-1386.

SESSION 8

HIS LOVE

PSALM 136:1-5,10-15,23-26

- 1** **A** Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.
B *His faithful love endures forever.*
- 2** Give thanks to the **C** God of gods.
His faithful love endures forever.
- 3** Give thanks to the **D** Lord of lords.
His faithful love endures forever.
- 4** He alone does **E** great wonders.
His faithful love endures forever.
- 5** He **F** made the heavens skillfully.
His faithful love endures forever. [...]
- 10** He struck the **G** firstborn of the Egyptians
His faithful love endures forever.
- 11** and **H** brought Israel out from among them
His faithful love endures forever.
- 12** with a **I** strong hand and outstretched arm.
His faithful love endures forever.
- 13** He divided the Red Sea
His faithful love endures forever.
- 14** and led Israel through,
His faithful love endures forever.
- 15** but hurled Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea.
His faithful love endures forever. [...]
- 23** He **J** remembered us in our **K** humiliation
His faithful love endures forever.
- 24** and rescued us from our **L** foes.
His faithful love endures forever.
- 25** He gives **M** food to every creature.
His faithful love endures forever.
- 26** Give thanks to **N** the God of heaven!
His faithful love endures forever.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** The first of three calls to confessional thanksgiving to God in recognition of who He is
- b** Love in Hebrew translates *chesed*, “unchanging love.” “For His lovingkindness (graciousness, mercy, compassion) endures forever” (AMP); “his steadfast love endures forever” (ESV); “His love never quits” (MSG); “his mercy endureth for ever” (KJV); “His lovingkindness is everlasting” (NASB).
- c** Supreme God; sovereign over heaven and earth
- d** Covenant name revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3)
- e** Mighty wondrous deeds that God solely performed.
- f** “God called the expanse ‘sky.’ Evening came and then morning: the second day” (Gen. 1:8; also see vv. 14-18).
- g** The tenth plague on Pharaoh and the Egyptians (Ex. 11:4-8).
- h** The exodus; God delivered Israel from slavery and bondage in Egypt (Ex. 12:31-42).
- i** A reference to God’s power and the manifestation of that power in the deliverance of His people.
- j** Through all circumstances, God meets every conceivable situation with a solution.
- k** “Low estate” (KJV, NASB); “weakness” (NLT); literally a depressed condition
- l** A reference to various nations who threatened Israel; see verses 19-20 for two examples.
- m** Sustenance; God not only created the world and everything in it, but He also provides for and sustains all of His creation.
- n** The only place in Psalms where God is called “the God of heaven;” the phrase highlights God’s uniqueness.

NOTES

1. IN CREATION (Ps. 136:1-5)

- The psalmist reminded everyone of God’s enduring love, pointing to the care with which God designed His creation.

2. IN CONQUEST (Ps. 136:10-15)

- God’s deliverance and His provision of the promised land as proofs of His enduring love.
- Note: Affirm God’s love for all people and His enacting justice against those who reject Him.

3. IN COMPASSION (Ps. 136:23-26)

- The psalmist called for God to be praised because of His intervention on their behalf and for His provisions.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

God’s unchanging love gives us reasons to celebrate.

- People can trust God and His plans—namely that He will accomplish His purposes for our good.
- Believers should thank God for delivering them and providing an eternal home.
- Believers can celebrate God’s provisions, both His physical and spiritual provisions.



FOCUS ATTENTION

What are some of your favorite ways to celebrate?

What makes something a celebration?

- Foods, actions, decorations, memorialization (photographs, traditions, etc.), places, and more help us celebrate people and accomplishments.
- Today we'll learn that God's unchanging love gives us more than enough reason to celebrate Him.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

PSALM 136:1-5

Psalm 136 is a hymn meant to be sung responsively.

What is the response for every verse? Why repeat this particular refrain?

- Hymn psalms are uniquely liturgical and can be sung responsively.
- Hymn psalms typically include a call to praise God and then describe the reasons to praise Him.

What do verses 1-5 reveal about God's character?

- God is thoroughly and consistently good. Unlike people, God is not still developing or deciding who He will be.
- God's character is steadfast, powerful, reliable, true, and trustworthy from first to last.
- *Chesed* is the Hebrew term for God's unfailing love.

Which of God's character elements have you seen evidence of most recently?

- Encourage each group member to share something different, with no pressure to outdo the others. Focus on the profoundness of the simple. "Great wonders" (v. 4) can be as unique as the sunset every day.
- Explore God's superior power as the "God of gods" (v. 2) and how He triumphs over cruelty, injustice, arrogance, and others who misuse power.

What does the choral refrain reveal about God's love?

- Other Bible translations say, "His love endures forever" (NIV); "his steadfast love endures forever" (ESV); "His love never quits" (MSG); and "his mercy endureth for ever" (KJV).
- God's love draws us to Him, guides us in daily actions, and gives us the foundation to make good choices.

How do you personally know you can trust God?

- God's history of care is our history of care.
- The psalmist pointed to the care with which God designed His creation.

PSALM 136:10-15

These verses detail historical events. What were God's loving provisions of justice during this time in Israel's history?

- Exodus 6–16 tells one example of God's enduring love.
- God's "strong hand and outstretched arm" (v. 12) picture His power.
- Thank God for enacting justice against those who act cruelly.

How can we know God has, is, or will provide deliverance?

- God's provision of deliverance from evil is neither formulaic nor instant.
- Even in the history detailed in verses 10-15, the Israelites had waited approximately 400 years for deliverance.
- Revelation 21:1-4 is one of many passages that speaks to this.
- God often uses people to bring about His good plans (Mic. 6:6-8); conversely, we can choose to create pain (Amos 4:1).

PSALM 136:23-26

These verses give more examples of God's provision.

How does God provide emotionally? Physically? Spiritually? Interpersonally? In the workplace? At home?

- Believers celebrate God's provision.
- The psalmist called for God to be praised because He remembered the Israelites, rescued them, and provided food.
- God's provision cannot be limited to such descriptions as giving us what we need at just the moment we need it.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

We live in a hurting world. What's our role in providing love, resources, and goodness, even though God is the ultimate provider?

- As people made in God's image, we are responsible to express His love, goodness, and cleverness. He frequently works through people to meet the needs of others.
- **Personal Challenge:** At least once an hour, to influence your treatment of people and the decisions you make, repeat the refrain from Psalm 136. If you have a chiming clock, let that be your cue to repeat the verse. Or set your phone to remind you. How does contemplating this reality change the way you relate to others at home, at work, in your community, and at your church?

OBJECT LESSON

A BUTTERFLY NET

Display a butterfly net (available in most sporting goods stores). Ask: *What's the purpose of this net? What's the purpose of its features?* Let the group share reasons for catching butterflies and how the structure and the function of a net allows one to do so.

Explain: *All of us have gotten caught in nets we didn't see. We may not have even realized we were caught. Some of these nets include selfishness, calling bad good, assuming we are smarter than God, arrogance, or other sins that keep us tangled up.* Guide the group to search Psalm 136:1-5 for reasons we can trust God to show us the way out of tangles we get ourselves into.

Note that once a butterfly (or fish or whatever is in the net) realizes it is caught, it vigorously tries to get out. Say: *Search Psalm 136:10-15 for actions of God that equipped His people to find their way out of captivity.* Explain that their problem was slavery under the iron fist of Egypt's Pharaoh. Affirm during the discussion that God's provision of deliverance from evil is not formulaic or instant, but it is definite. Guide the group to express how to work with God's redemptive efforts on their own behalf and on others' behalf.



Finally, suggest that once creatures are freed from the net, they might feel disoriented, sometimes struggling to find their way once back on the right path. Ask: *How can we be God's hands of help for others to stay on the right track? What actions from Psalm 136:23-26 might God do through us for others? How might He rescue directly?*

DIG DEEPER

THE LOVE OF GOD

Translating the different Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek words used for love in the Bible, the CSB renders the word "love" 766 times. If we looked at broader expressions of God's love toward man (care, mercy, compassion, etc.), it would be nearly impossible to count.

Perhaps the most important Old Testament term describing God's love is *chesed*. It is always translated "loving kindness" in the NASB and "everlasting love" in the ESV.

A summary of the way *chesed*—kindness and faithful love—are used reveals a broad spectrum of meanings: deeds of devotion, faithfulness, favor, goodness, kindness, loyalty, mercy and unchangeableness. Many commentators will distill the word group to mean loyal love, but that seems to fall short of a full expression.

While any single definition is inadequate, God loves to be loyal to His promises and His covenant people. We may not tend to think of loyalty as love—due to our language deficit—but think of God the Father, who is always loyal to keep His promises. It is God's character.

It's who He is: He is always true, always faithful, and always loyal to His Word and to His people. We often say we believe in the promises of God, but do we connect this to His nature as a loving God and Father? We say God loves us, but do we reflect on the immeasurable nature of His love: that He chose us before the foundation of the

world, sent Christ to die for us, indwells us with His Spirit, is merciful, compassionate, and forgives us again, and again? God never tires of our prayers or gets disappointed and abandons us.

The psalmists' paint vivid portraits of God's faithful love. No matter what you feel regarding human love, I encourage you to re-think and re-frame your view of God's love for you. Spouses, parents, siblings, children, and close friends may fail us. Rather than become jaded or withdrawn, be mindful that we, too, fail in our love toward others.

But beyond the broken hearts and broken relationships, the perfect God loves you perfectly. Your God and Father is indeed the greatest Lover of your soul.¹

1. Adapted from Michael Easley, "Exploring God's Unconditional Love for You," available in its entirety at lifeway.com.

SESSION 9

HIS FAITHFULNESS

PSALM 146:1-10

1 **A** Hallelujah!

My **B** soul, praise the LORD.

2 I will praise the LORD **C** all my life;
I will sing to my God as long as I live.

3 Do not trust in **D** nobles,
in a son of man, who cannot **B** save.

4 When his breath leaves him,
he **E** returns to the ground;
on that day **G** his plans die.

5 Happy is the one whose help is the **H** God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD his God,

6 the **I** Maker of heaven and earth,
the sea and everything in them.

He remains **O** faithful forever,
7 executing **K** justice for the **L** exploited
and giving food to the hungry.
The LORD frees prisoners.

8 The LORD opens the eyes of the blind.
The LORD raises up those who are oppressed.
The LORD loves the righteous.

9 The LORD protects resident aliens
and helps the fatherless and the widow,
but he **M** frustrates the ways of the wicked.

10 The LORD reigns forever;
N Zion, your God reigns for all generations.
Hallelujah!

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** The transliteration of the Hebrew word that literally means “praise the Lord”
- b** Refers to the vital and eternal existence of a human being
- c** The psalmist declared a public commitment to praise God throughout his life and to praise God with music.
- d** “Princes” (AMP, KJV, ESV, NASB); “powerful people” (NLT)
- e** To help or deliver
- f** Death; refers to the psalmist’s humanity. Genesis 2:7 says, “Then the LORD God formed the man out of the dust from the ground and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and the man became a living being.”
- g** Humankind’s “thoughts and plans” (AMP), “projects” (MSG) will never surpass God’s.
- h** Links the psalmist’s generation to the God of earlier generations; a designation of the nation Israel
- i** The acknowledgment of God in His role as Creator
- j** Demonstrates true and constant support or loyalty
- k** Moral rightness in action or attitude; righteousness
- l** Oppressed; taken advantage of
- m** “Turneth upside down” (KJV); “thwarts” (NASB); “makes crooked” (AMP)
- n** While Zion was used by biblical writers in a variety of ways, many of the psalmists used the term to refer to the temple built by Solomon; the most common usage refers to the city of God in the new age.

1. THE DECLARATION (Ps. 146:1-2)

- The psalmist declared his intention of remaining faithful to God and praising the Lord until he died.

2. THE WARNING (Ps. 146:3-4)

- The psalmist issued a warning against ultimately trusting in leaders and other people since they will die as well.

3. THE WORTHY ONE (Ps. 146:5-9)

- The psalmist exclaimed that God alone provides true happiness and hope, remaining forever faithful to His people.
- Note: Emphasize God being true to His character in every situation, executing justice and extending grace fairly.

4. THE REALITY (Ps. 146:10)

- The psalmist proclaimed that God's reign is forever, from generation to generation, giving all a reason to rejoice.

» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

God can be trusted as the One who reigns eternally.

- Believers can praise God for His faithfulness.
- Failing to trust in God will lead to disappointment and ruin.
- God can be trusted to remain faithful forever.
- Believers can live in the light of God's eternal reign, praising Him as God.



FOCUS ATTENTION

What makes a king—or any leader—someone you want to follow or not?

- By overviewing characteristics of good and bad leadership we more readily see the pure motives of God’s leadership. Consequently, we can trust God as our king (see vv. 3-5).
- Have a group member read the summary statement: “God can be trusted as one who reigns eternally.”
- Our God truly feels with us, and He knows how to navigate us through life.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

PSALM 146:1-2

Notice that the psalmist commanded his soul to praise God. How is praise more of a decision than a feeling? What is the role of feelings in praise? What has made you decide to praise God?

- Subsequent verses in this psalm highlight characteristics of God that call to us: He is trustworthy. His help brings happiness. He is maker of heaven and earth and forever faithful. He frees prisoners, opens eyes, raises the oppressed, loves the righteous, protects foreigners, helps the fatherless and widow, frustrates the ways of the wicked, and reigns forever.
- Our actions praise—or deny—God. Praise connects us to God.

How is praise more lifestyle than words? How do we praise the Lord with the deepest parts of our souls?

- Verses that speak to this include Amos 5:21-24 and Romans 12:1-2.
- The psalmist planned to remain faithful to God until he died.

PSALM 146:3-4

Why did the psalmist warn against trusting in nobles?

- God, the King of the universe, is immortal.
- Human leaders are mortal and have limited power.

How is trust built? What clues tell us if someone is worth trusting?

- Failing to trust in God will lead to disappointment and ruin. Why is this neutral fact rather than opinion?
- People who show godly character are trustworthy.
- Discuss what makes us trust a person who is untrustworthy.

PSALM 146:5-9

What characteristics of God, in verses 5-9, make Him someone you would trust?

- The KJV says in verse 9 that God “turneth upside down” the ways of the wicked.

- The reign of God is not for the psalmist’s generation only, but for future generations and for eternity (Ps. 146:10; Rev. 11:15).

What in these verses, and in your experience, confirms God’s trustworthiness?

- God stays true in every situation, wisely executing justice and extending grace fairly.
- God can be trusted to remain faithful forever.

Psalm 146:6 presents powerful images. Sketch these images to help you memorize it.

- Include something in your drawing that reminds you of every word in the verse.
- Affirm one another’s drawings.

PSALM 146:10

What does work look like when God is our king? What do actions in our home look like with Him as king? What does solving problems look like when He rules?

- Believers live in the light of God’s eternal reign.
- Praise ultimately shows in our actions.
- Verses that speak to this include Exodus 20:1-17 and Philippians 4:8-9.

What might our actions teach other generations—both older and younger—about God as our King?

- Tell about someone in a generation before you who has shown you how to live with God as your king. Tell about someone in a generation after you who has shown you this.
- God’s reign is forever, from generation to generation. Explore our roles in this.
- These discussions create intergenerational connections in our churches. Call for volunteers to share about these in your church or Bible study group.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

How is trusting God active rather than passive? What active step will you take in your home and in one other place to show you trust God as your leader?

- Making a decision and announcing it increases success in obeying our King.
- **Personal Challenge:** If you said no words, then what would your actions teach about God? How accurate is your picture? Revise your actions in the coming week to show praise to and for God in ways we’ve explored today.



OBJECT LESSON

METAL SPOONS

Give each group member a metal spoon. Note that a spoon is the first utensil an infant uses to eat solid foods. Read Psalm 146:1-2, and ask: *Why are the actions in verses 1-2 good beginning actions for a new Christian? Similar to the way people continue to use spoons throughout their adult lives, how is praising the Lord with our souls a wise continuing action for a seasoned Christian?*

Ask: *How is a metal spoon superior to a plastic one? How can God lead in ways other humans cannot? Why trust a metal spoon over a plastic one? Why trust God over a human leader?*

State: *Spoons help meet a basic human need—getting food into our mouths.* Lead the group to search Psalm 146:5-9 for basic human needs that God meets (hope, justice, food, freedom, sight, release from oppression, love, protection, end to wickedness, etc.).

Explain: *People have been carving, smithing, or otherwise creating spoons for generations.* Send the group to Psalm 146:10. Ask: *According to this verse: How has God’s reign been steady across generations? How does God equally meet the unique needs of each generation?*



Walk around with a container in which to collect the spoons. Affirm that we’re all doing life together on this globe. Similar to the way these spoons clink and rattle together we will sometime create troubles for each other, but with compassion and deliberate choice we can share our space in ways that heal and meet the needs described in verses 5-9.



DIG DEEPER

HELP FOR THE HELPLESS

The social emphasis found in Psalm 146 is much like that of the prophets and of Jesus. Consider the thread that runs through Scripture from Isaiah to the Gospels that tells us of Jesus, echoed in the psalmist’s words.

Isaiah, the 8th Century B.C. Israelite prophet from Judah included a social emphasis in the message God gave him for the people of his day:

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor, and the day of our God’s vengeance; to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who mourn in Zion; to give them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, festive oil instead of mourning, and splendid clothes instead of despair. And they will be called righteous trees, planted by the LORD to glorify him.” (Isa. 61:1-3)

Psalm 146 contains an impressive list of social concerns. The psalmist reinforces Isaiah’s claims that God helps those who cannot help themselves:

“Happy is the one whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them. He remains faithful forever, executing justice for the exploited and giving food to the hungry. The Lord frees prisoners. The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord raises up those who are oppressed. The Lord loves the righteous. The Lord protects resident aliens and helps the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.” (Ps. 146:5-9)

Jesus expressed Isaiah’s social emphasis early in His ministry:

“He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. As usual, he entered the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him, and unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. And the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him. He began by saying to them, ‘Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled.’” (Luke 4:16-21)

SESSION 10

THE CONFESSION

PSALM 51:1-17

¹ Be gracious to me, God, according to your faithful love; according to your abundant compassion, **A blot out my** **B rebellion.** ² Completely **C wash away my guilt and cleanse me from my** **D sin.** ³ For I am conscious of my rebellion, and my sin is always before me. ⁴ Against you—you alone—I have sinned and done this evil in your sight. So you are right when you **E pass sentence**; you are blameless when you judge. ⁵ Indeed, I was **F guilty when I was born**; I was sinful when my mother conceived me. ⁶ Surely you **G desire integrity in the inner self**, and you teach me wisdom deep within. ⁷ **H Purify me with** **I hyssop**, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. ⁸ Let me **J hear joy and gladness**; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. ⁹ Turn your face away from my sins and blot out all my guilt. ¹⁰ **K God, create a clean heart for me** and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹ Do not banish me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore the joy of your salvation to me, and sustain me by giving me **L a willing spirit.** ¹³ Then I will teach the rebellious your ways, and sinners will return to you. ¹⁴ Save me from the **M guilt of bloodshed**, God—God of my salvation—and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. ¹⁵ Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. ¹⁶ You do not want a sacrifice, or I would give it; you are not pleased with a burnt offering. ¹⁷ The sacrifice pleasing to God is **N a broken spirit.** You will not despise a broken and humbled heart, God.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** Erase; remove from the record
- b** Transgressions; defiance of what is right; a deliberate act; “my sins are staring me down” (MSG)
- c** Forgiveness makes a difference in a soiled life. Sin leaves dirty, contaminated lives that require deep cleaning.
- d** Iniquity; perverse and crooked: separating one from God; missing the mark; moral failure
- e** God judges and determines the future fate of the guilty.
- f** Not due to his parent’s sin but aware that he was born into a sinful society of which he is now a part
- g** “Desire truth in the innermost being” (AMP); “desire honesty from the womb” (NLT)
- h** Purge me; literally “unsin” me; God’s forgiveness means no sin ever occurred.
- i** The marjoram plant frequently used in ceremonies of cleaning and purification (see Ex. 12:22; Lev. 14:4).
- j** To jump for joy; the experience of a prodigal son reconciled to his father
- k** Only God can erase sin and create a new person.
- l** A noble spirit; “make me willing to obey you” (NLT)
- m** This refers to any sin that could mean the termination of his life.
- n** The psalmist’s sincerity was expressed in the greatest sacrifice he could offer.

1. GUILTY AS CHARGED (Ps. 51:1-5)

- The psalmist (David) declared his guilt as a sinner, confessing that his sin was against God alone.
- The psalmist placed himself at God's mercy, knowing God was his only hope.
- Note: Set the context for this psalm, pointing to 2 Samuel 12, where David was confronted by Nathan after David's affair with Bathsheba.

2. PLEA FOR CLEANSING (Ps. 51:6-13)

- David pled for God to cleanse and purify him from the guilt of sin and of the sin itself.
- The psalmist realized he would have no joy until God acted.

3. DELIVERANCE THROUGH BROKENNESS (Ps. 51:14-17)

- David called on God to deliver him.
- The psalmist declared that repentance (being broken and humble) was required for forgiveness, as opposed to an offering.

» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

The realization of our sin should move us to confession and repentance.

- All people have committed sin and are therefore guilty before God.
- Forgiveness of sin comes only through God's provision, His Son.
- Believers should approach God for forgiveness with brokenness and humility over their sin.



FOCUS ATTENTION

Tell about doing something wrong as a child and how you responded.

- As children facing punishment, we would hide ourselves, destroy the evidence, make excuses, blame others, hope no one would find out, and more.
- Encourage camaraderie to open your group to a tender topic.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE PSALM 51:1-5

What feelings from childhood misbehaviors might the psalmist have experienced while talking with God in these verses? How hard is it to admit our wrongs, even to God?

- In some ways we haven't changed much since being children.
- Verbally admitting the difficulty of confessing sin can start us on the path of stopping its power over us.
- The context for this psalm is 2 Samuel 12 during which Nathan confronted David about his affair with Bathsheba. David had been hiding his sin, including arranging the murder of Bathsheba's husband.

Is it harder to admit our wrongs to God or to a close friend? Explain.

- We can choose phrases from these verses to help us start conversations with God about easy and hard choices.
- God helps us without ulterior motive.
- Psalm 51 is a penitential psalm; David pleaded to be restored to a right relationship with God.

Why do we hesitate to confess our sins to God? What frees us to approach Him?

- God communicates throughout Scripture that when we turn to Him in honest recognition of our wrongs He will heal us and show us how to start again.
- God is our only hope, and even in that position of power He will not hurt us.
- We may believe we're the only ones who have foolishly done wrong. It's not true. We all sin and make mistakes.

PSALM 51:6-13

What phrases in verses 6-13 describe the new beginning you'd want after a wrongdoing?

- We need fresh starts after repenting from sin.
- As believers, we crave righteousness and goodness.
- Even so, we find many ways to resist this craving.

How might we develop a habit of little fresh starts? How would this reduce the impact of long-term selfishness?

- We can choose habits that develop righteousness and goodness.

Examine the qualities in verses 6-13 one at a time—integrity, purity, joy, a clean heart, and more. How do we cultivate each? What is life like when one is missing?

- Sometimes looking at other people shows us what we want—or don't want—in our own lives.

PSALM 51:14-17

Verses 14-15 can appear like deal-making or being bossy. What do these verses encourage?

- Nobody likes a fake or manipulative apology.
- God knows our spirit, and so do we. So choose the freedom that comes from actually fleeing sin.
- Review verses 1-13 for ways to truly sacrifice our wicked ways.
- Repentance is the best offering we can give to God.

Psalm 51:17 uses the phrases "a broken spirit" and "a broken and humbled heart." What is real brokenness? How does it differ from false humility?

- Brokenness and humility are often misunderstood or misused, so let the group discuss the real deal.
- Agony over the wrong things we've done and the people we've hurt shows our hearts really do yearn to do rightly and choose goodness.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

Guilt is a good response to wrongdoing or failing to do what's right. When have you been glad to feel guilty? When have you run from guilt? What's the difference between healthy guilt (from God) and false guilt (twisted by Satan)?

- The Holy Spirit remains in believers even though we sin.
- Martin Luther described this as the simultaneous reality of saint and sinner.
- God's Spirit convicts people of sin (John 16:7-9), produces fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), and creates a new heart in believers (Ezek. 36:25-26).
- **Personal Challenge:** Develop a habit of hearing God so accurately that you act upon guilt right away. Stop what's wrong. Start what's right. This willing spirit is described in Psalm 51:10-13.

OBJECT LESSON

AN INSIDE-OUT SHIRT

Wear a shirt inside-out, with a t-shirt underneath. Once most of the group has noticed, explain: *Repentance turns things right-side-out again. An inside-out shirt is one picture of repentance, illustrating that often others notice our need for repentance before we do.*

Read Psalm 51:1-5. Ask: *What illustrations of repentance do we see in these verses? What does it teach you about the nature of repentance?* Discuss the nature of repentance, how we see the need for it, and how to repent rather than just feel badly.

As a group member reads Psalm 51:6, turn your shirt right-side-out and put it on. Explain: *God is the source of the cleansing, but we must choose to allow this—to express a “willing spirit.”*

Read in unison verse 12. Thank the group for not shunning you when your shirt was inside out.

Focus on verse 17, picturing God’s response to us when we go to Him with a repentant spirit. Ask: *Why do you suppose the psalmist used the descriptor “broken”? How do we know God will help us? How has God put you back together when you’ve gone to Him with a repentant heart?*



Inside Outside Upside Down is the name of a children’s book by Stan and Jan Berenstain. The title describes what happens when we ignore God. It may seem fun at first, but then it hurts people. Invite the group to name a phrase from Psalm 51 that might be a title to a story about repentance. Possibilities abound, so let every group member name a different phrase and tell why they’d like to read that book.

DIG DEEPER

FOUR WORDS FOR SIN

King David used four different words for “sin” in the first couple of verses of Psalm 51.

1. Transgressions: Acts of rebellion, choosing your own way (v. 1)

It literally means overstep, trespass, step across the line. If you step over a property line you have trespassed on another person’s land; the person who steps across God’s standard of righteousness has committed a trespass or transgression.

God has put up certain boundaries in this life to protect us and to protect others—physical, moral, and spiritual laws. When we don’t follow those rules—either by choice or accident, there are consequences to pay. David crossed the line not when he noticed Bathsheba on the roof but when he sent someone to check her out.

2. Iniquity: Moral crookedness or perversity (v. 2)

Iniquity means that which is altogether wrong. You can’t excuse it; you can’t offer some sort of an apology for it; you can’t in any way condone it. That’s iniquity.

3. Sin: To miss the mark, fail to measure up to God’s standards (v. 3)

In verses 2 and 3 it is the Hebrew word *chattath*, meaning “sin offering.” In verse 4 it is *chata*, translated in the Septuagint by the Greek word *hamartia*, meaning “to miss the mark.” That’s all—just miss the mark.

4. Evil: Wickedness (v. 4)

The word “evil” used here by David means that which is actually wrong. The Bible is clear on what is right and what is wrong. God is unmistakably certain on these things. Evil is that which is actually wrong.

David admitted his guilt. In the time of David it had become commonplace for kings to do the types of things that David did. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

With those definitions, do any of you want to say that you are without sin? So, we have to agree with Jesus when we transgress or trespass, when we behave immorally, when we miss the mark, or when we do evil.

So what do we do? What David did.¹

1. Adapted from Craig Webb, “God Gave - John 3, Psalm 51,” available in its entirety at lifeway.com.

SESSION 11

THE CLEANSING

PSALM 32:1-11

¹ How **a joyful** is the one
whose **b transgression** is forgiven, whose sin is **c covered!**

² How joyful is a person whom
the LORD **d does not charge** with iniquity
and in whose spirit is **e no deceit!**

³ When I kept **f silent**, my **g bones** became brittle
from my groaning all day long.

⁴ For day and night your **h hand** was heavy on me;
my strength was drained as in the summer's heat. *Selah*

⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to you
and did not conceal my **i iniquity**.
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,"
and you forgave the guilt of my sin. *Selah*

⁶ Therefore let everyone who is faithful pray to you
immediately.

When **j great floodwaters** come,
they will not reach him.

⁷ You are my **k hiding place**;
you protect me from trouble.
You surround me with joyful shouts of deliverance.

⁸ I will instruct you and show you the way to go;
with my eye on you, I will give counsel.

⁹ Do not be like a **l horse or mule**,
without understanding,
that must be controlled with **m bit and bridle**
or else it will not come near you.

¹⁰ Many pains come to the wicked,
but the one who trusts in the LORD
will have **n faithful love** surrounding him.

¹¹ Be glad in the LORD and rejoice,
you **o righteous ones**;
shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

a "Blessed [fortunate, prosperous, favored by God]" (AMP); "Oh, what joy" (NLT); "Blessed" (ESV)

b Deliberate disobedience to God's known will

c Lifted as a burden from the shoulders; "put out of sight" (NLT)

d Legal image of a judge dismissing a case, reflective of God's judgment on humanity

e "God has cleared their record" (TLB); "lived in complete honesty" (NLT); "no guile" (KJV)

f Refusal to confess or acknowledge

g The psalmist described his guilt as an unbearable burden that literally made him ill and depressed.

h The psalmist came under deep conviction for his sins.

i Crooked and perverse qualities

j Trials and tribulations (see Job 22:10-11)

k An image of God's protection when a threat approaches

l A reference to the stubborn qualities of a horse and mule

m Head gear used to guide a horse in the right direction. James 3:3 says, "Now if we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we direct their whole bodies."

n "Lovingkindness" (NASB); "compassion and lovingkindness" (AMP); "steadfast love" (ESV); "mercy" (KJV); "unfailing love" (NLT)

o Those who are in right relationship with God

1. THE CONTRAST (Ps. 32:1-4)

- The psalmist (David) contrasted the joy (“blessing” in KJV) found in being forgiven of his sin with the weight of living with unconfessed sin.
- Note: Set the possible context of this psalm as being after David confessed his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. Explain the differences in the four different Hebrew words used to describe our disobedience to God in verses 1 and 2.

2. THE DECISION (Ps. 32:5)

- David declared that he found rest from his guilt only after confessing his sins to the Lord.

3. THE COUNSEL (Ps. 32:6-9)

- David counseled all the people of God to turn from their stubbornness and admit their sin to God.
- He characterized God as being available at the moment, offering protection and deliverance.
- Note: Emphasize that the psalmist understood that there would be a day when forgiveness would no longer be available. Characterize David as teaching from his own experience, having learned an invaluable lesson through his own failures.

4. THE CONCLUSION (Ps. 32:10-11)

- David concluded by contrasting the pains of the wicked with the joy of the one who trusts in God and finds forgiveness.

» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

God’s complete forgiveness of those who turn to Him in faith produces gratitude.

- Believers must confess their sins to the Father or face the possibility of becoming spiritually despondent.
- People can find rest and mercy when they confess their sins to the Father.
- Believers can encourage others in their spiritual life, teaching others from experience.
- Believers should respond to God’s forgiveness with gratitude and joy.



FOCUS ATTENTION

Sadness affects both body and soul. Without saying what you are sad about, tell how sadness affects your body.

- Shoulders droop, eyes cry, heads look down, mouths grow speechless, and more.
- Don't probe for specifics of anyone's sadness. Instead explore the pervasiveness of sadness.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE PSALM 32:1-4

Psalm 32:1-4 is a picture of sadness. How was the psalmist's body affected by his sadness?

- Bones became brittle, voices groaned, strength was drained.
- Encourage multiple phrasings, such as arms ached due to brittle bones.

Peek briefly at verse 5 for the reason for this writer's sadness. Why would this cause such agony?

- Behaving as if nothing is wrong leeches our energy. It weighs us down.
- Despondency persists and deepens when we refuse to notice and admit wrongs.
- Again, don't press group members for details. If they begin to talk about sins, pull them back to the principles of hiding sin.

What brought relief to this tortured psalmist? Why would the contrast be so stark, so palpable?

- Hiding sin brings pain, not protection.
- Ceasing deceit—or any selfish motive—produces upright joy.

PSALM 32:5

Why would anyone refuse to confess sin? What do you suppose gave the psalmist the courage to stop hiding his sin?

- His sins were not minor: he had jilted responsibilities, slept with another man's wife, and then arranged the murder of her husband.
- David hid his sins until someone confronted him about them. But then he chose to be honest with God and with himself.
- Contrite, David confesses his affair with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah.
- Psalm 32 is the second penitential psalm in this series.

PSALM 32:6-9

How is God's forgiveness a sheltering hiding place?

- David didn't stop with confessing his own sin. His writings urge others to talk to God.
- Explore how much power we have, or don't have, to prompt people to turn their lives around.

What promises and warnings did the psalmist give? When have you heeded one of these warnings or received one of these blessings?

- David counseled people to turn from stubbornness and admit wrongdoing.
- David characterized God as being available, offering protection and deliverance.

Acting like a mule come naturally to many of us. Why are we stubborn enough to think we know more than God?

- A tension exists between God being the only safe place, and our false assumptions that we must protect ourselves by hiding from Him—or bucking His direction.
- Discuss the freedom that can be found when we obey God rather than presupposing He will deprive us.

What bits (v. 9) might God use to direct a person? What pain might be involved?

- Believers can encourage others in life, urging them to learn from experiences and from the Bible.
- Discuss how we can avoid bossing, condescending, and other pitfalls when attempting to guide others.

PSALM 32:10-11

Contrast the pains of the wicked with the joys of those who actually obey God. What are the root causes for these differences? What makes people assume the opposite is true—that joy comes to those who do whatever they want to do?

- Forgiveness is not a once-and-done solution but the first step on a journey of trusting and obeying God.
- Those who respond to God's forgiveness not only find love and gladness; their behavior generates it for others. Ponder the good created by centered people.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

What is an upright heart? What verses from Psalm 32 explain the meaning of an upright heart?

- The way we live out forgiveness is as important as the way we turn from sin.
- **Personal Challenge:** Create a reminder of an upright heart. This could be an object that stands upright such as a symbol you sculpt or draw or a paragraph you write. Use this as a reminder to choose upright actions, words, and attitudes.

OBJECT LESSON

A BRICK

Let one group member hold a brick at arms' length. Ask the group to describe what this group member's arms are likely experiencing (weight, cramps, shaking). Then invite the brick holder's input. Say: *The weight of sin is something we've all experienced, and whether it's our arms or someone else's arms, we can see and have compassion for the weight that person is carrying.* Hold up a Bible for that group member to read Psalm 32:3-4 while still holding the brick at arm's length.

Then allow the group member to lay down the brick and read Psalm 32:1-2. Discuss: *What are contrasts between holding on to wrongdoing and laying it down? Why do we hold on to actions that weigh us down?* Agree that we welcome laying down a brick, but we tend to hold our sins close to us. Read beginning words for laying down our sin in Psalm 32:5.

Set the brick on the floor and let a new volunteer stand on it. Say: *After such a freeing experience with forgiveness, the psalmist urged others to talk with God and do as he says. How has talking with God lifted you up? How has obeying Him given you a firm foundation?*

Enlist a third volunteer to hold the brick at arms' length again. Read



verse 9. Suggest that we all can be stubborn like a mule. Ask: *Why do we bring pain upon ourselves even after we've experienced the blessings of God's advice?* Seek the contrast in verses 10-11. Pretend to aim the brick at a window or wall. Then elevate something with it. Explain that we all have power. We can use it to destroy or build others up. Ask: *What would verses 10-11 advise and why?*

DIG DEEPER

RELIEVING THE PAIN OF GUILT

Scholars believe David wrote Psalm 32 after he cried to God for forgiveness for his double sin of adultery and murder. His release from guilt was sweet. This psalm offers practical steps to release us from guilt.

A. Admit your guilt (v. 5).

Our society has witnessed the downfall of politicians, ministers, businessmen, and other leaders. When caught, many sidestep the issue of admitting guilt. Instead they blame others or are blinded by their own self-righteousness. David, however, acknowledged his sin.

The first step on the road to recovery and relief is admitting that something is wrong in our life. At times our lives are out of sync. Sometimes they are like picture frames hanging crooked. Guilt is the result of our souls, created in God's image, crying foul. God's laws have been violated; His honor diminished. Something deep within me shouts in protest. I feel the shout as guilt.

B. Confront the guilt (v. 5).

Next, David "did not conceal [his] iniquity" (Psalm 32:5). He stopped trying to hide his sin. Guilt must be confronted and dealt with. To overcome it we can't continue to hide its reality. We must deal with it. If we don't deal with our guilt, then our guilt will deal with us.

It may affect you psychologically (v. 3). David could not get the wrong out of his mind. It awoke with him. It followed him throughout

his daily activities. It gnawed at him as he tried to sleep.

It may affect you spiritually (v. 4). Sin separates us from God. It drives wedges in our relationships with our Maker. Those barriers will remain until we deal with them.

It may affect you physically (v. 4). Like water that evaporates on a sunny day, so did David's physical condition. I've heard of people who lost their appetites, couldn't sleep, experienced shortness of breath, or were sick all because of guilty feelings.

C. Confess your guilt (v. 5).

The next step to recovery is to tell it to God like it is. Confession is not telling God something He doesn't already know. In fact, the word *confession* means "to agree with." When we confess our sins to God we agree that we have rebelled against His authority. When we confess our guilt to the Lord, He promises to forgive (v. 1). This means that He takes it away, like a burden lifted. He covers it over (v. 1). In other words, God hides it from His sight. He does not count it against us. He clears our record (v. 1). The debt is paid or canceled.

D. Forget your guilt (vv. 1,5).

God forgets our confessed sin and so should we. God doesn't just put a record of our past mistakes in a closet; He obliterates them. They are gone forever.

SESSION 12

THE PROTECTOR

PSALM 141:1-10

1 LORD, I **a** call on you; hurry to help me.
Listen to my voice when I call on you.

2 May my prayer be set before you as incense,
the raising of my hands as the **b** evening offering.

3 LORD, set up a **c** guard for my mouth;
keep watch at the door of my lips.

4 Do not let my heart turn to any evil thing
or perform **d** wicked acts
with men who commit sin.

Do not let me **e** feast on their delicacies.

5 Let the **f** righteous one strike me—
it is an act of **g** faithful love;
let him rebuke me—
it is **h** oil for my head;
let me not refuse it.

Even now my prayer is against
the evil acts of the wicked.

6 When their rulers will be thrown off
the sides of a cliff,
the people will listen to my words,
for they are pleasing.

7 As when one plows and breaks up the soil,
turning up rocks,
so our bones have been **i** scattered
at the mouth of Sheol.

8 But my eyes look to you, LORD, my Lord.
I seek refuge in you; do not let me die.

9 Protect me from the trap they have set for me,
and from the snares of evildoers.

10 Let the wicked fall into **j** their own nets,
while I **k** pass by safely.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

a The typical opening of the lamenting psalms;
a desperate plea to God in recognition of Him as
a source of help

b Rituals, like offering incense, were given daily
in the temple and directed specifically to God
(Ex. 29:38-46; 30:1-8).

c Stand watch; protect; warn of ensuing danger
or threat

d Behavior performed without thinking through
the consequences

e An allusion to the tasty tidbits of evil and
disobedience that tempt the psalmist and those
around him

f Those in right relationship with God and living
lives that testify to their obedience to His ways

g "Kindness" (ESV, KJV, NASB, NLT)

h An anointing with perfumed oil was a sign of
courtesy shown guests at a banquet

i Sheol, in Hebrew thought, is the abode of the
dead, both righteous and wicked (Job 30:23);
"scattered at the grave's mouth" (KJV); "scattered
with burial" (NLT)

j The consequences of the actions taken by the
wicked; their evil acts boomeranged on them.

k To continue the journey of life by escaping the
threats of evil forces and wicked people

1. THE PLEA (Ps. 141:1-2)

- The psalmist (David) voiced his plea for God to hear his prayers as a pleasing sacrifice.

2. THE REQUESTS (Ps. 141:3-7)

- David identified his need for protection from temptation.
- He called on God to provide righteous people to hold him accountable for remaining faithful.
- He also prayed for the demise of the wicked and their leaders.
- Note: Emphasize David's understanding of his need for discipline and accountability.

3. THE PROMISE (Ps. 141:8-10)

- David promised to remain focused on God, trusting God to direct him.
- Note: Contrast those who focus on God to those who focus on evil.

» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

Believers should seek refuge in God because He is the only One who can give them strength to face temptation and evil.

- Believers can approach God with confidence, knowing He hears their prayers.
- Believers can hold each other accountable for living godly lives.
- God can be trusted to lead us to live godly lives by keeping our focus on Him.



FOCUS ATTENTION

What was your favorite hiding place when playing hide-and-seek as a child? Why did you like it?

- When we were young children, someone more experienced than us in hide-and-seek may have hidden us in a particular spot and told us to stay there.
- God is experienced with evil. He will show us where to hide from it and the temptation that leads to it.
- No matter how cleverly we hide from evil, it persistently seeks us out. God is the only one who can give us the strength and strategy to refuse it.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE PSALM 141:1-2

In other Bible passages God promises to help when we come to Him. Why then did David, the writer of this psalm, seem to plead with God to help him?

- Intense emotion, fear of the temptation dogging him, prayers that seem unaddressed, consciousness of how poorly he had done in the past, and sense of urgency are a few of many possibilities.
- It's OK to ask God for help respectfully, but we don't have to beg Him. He is persuaded by His love for us, not our fancy words or urgent pleadings.

What do you like about the approach David used in verse 2? Why would David want God to consider his request as an offering?

- Incense and raising hands were two tools used to worship God.
- The confidence to approach God comes from God's character, not ours.
- Explore why showing respect for God is foundational.

PSALM 141:3-7

How can we actually help each other obey God?

- David wanted righteous people to help him obey God. Because this is seldom done well, many believers avoid this responsibility with excuses such as, "It's not my business" or "They won't listen anyway."
- Rather than run from this tough responsibility, guide the group to articulate how to do it well.
- God designed us to live in community—we need each other to help us live righteously.

Read Psalm 141:5. Tell about a godly person who has exemplified this psalm for you.

- We all need people who will tell us the truth, rather than reinforce what we want to hear. These people truly care, and this care brings us the direction and comfort we crave.

- Proverbs 27:6 says, "The wounds of a friend are trustworthy, but the kisses of an enemy are excessive." Neither this verse nor Psalm 141:5 mean abuse or cruelty. What do they mean?
- "Oil for the head" was both a comfort and a grooming treatment.

David prayed for the demise of the wicked and their leaders in verses 5b-6. When might we find these prayers particularly easy to pray? With what tone should we pray them?

- Wicked people hurt others. David rightly yearned for this wickedness to stop.
- God also yearns for wicked behavior to stop. He weeps when people hurt each other.
- As certain wicked influences move out of the picture, teachable people find it easier to hear and heed God's instruction.

PSALM 141:8-10

Reread verse 9. Give examples of wicked behaviors and the nets those behaviors create. When do even Christians create nets of evil? Why do we fall into those nets? How would verse 5 help with this?

- Mention sins that are often acceptable in church, such as gossip disguised as prayer requests, cliques, critical words, racial prejudice, and economic bias.
- Consider listing several sins and taking turns telling how each one creates nets that entangle.

According to these verses, what leads someone to focus on God? What leads someone into evil's snares?

- As you contrast those who focus on God with those who focus on evil, reiterate that it's not one type of person against another but that any person could choose either path on any given day.
- Focus on how we can refuse evil.

What habits, persons, or daily decisions make focusing on God easier?

- Sin and temptations dog our paths, finding areas of weakness we didn't even know we had.
- God's Spirit will empower us to be faithful no matter what.
- Take both seriously: the power of God and the persistence of temptation.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

How do you know you can trust God to help you live your life? How do you show you actually trust Him?

- Give examples of behavior changes that show we believe God is the best one to guide us.
- **Personal Challenge:** Choose one phrase in Psalm 141 about resisting evil and temptation toward evil. Put it on your phone as a screen saver.

OBJECT LESSON

SOME PEBBLES

Give group members a pebble to put into their shoes. Instruct them to try to walk around. Say: *Temptation is like a single pebble in a shoe. We think we can keep walking with just that tiny pebble but what happened? How much power do those little temptations have?* Affirm that temptations worm their way into the tiniest chinks in our armor to poke at our tender places. Just when we think we have our weaknesses figured out, a new temptation plagues us.

Read Psalm 141:1-2 to find out who David talked with about his temptations toward evil. Say: *This is similar to what verses 3-7 encourage with "set a guard for my mouth" and turning to "the righteous" to help us.* Explain: *Psalm 141 is a lament—a prayer or cry to God when distressed. A powerful source of distress is temptation on our heels. The subject matter of laments can be expressed by the community or by individuals. Laments include enemies, illnesses, and other evils of this world.*

Stress: *When we share our woes with God He gives us concrete help. Christian friends and family are powerful vehicles of that help.* Guide the group to name the temptation categories David listed in



Psalm 141:3-4 and to give several examples of each. Then discuss how fellow Christians can help us refuse these sins.

Note that evildoers and evil behaviors sneakily set traps for us. Guide someone to read 141:8-10. Then discuss how the actions named in 141:8-10 help us see and avoid these traps.

Thank the group for being Psalm 141:5 people for one another.

DIG DEEPER

PREVENTIVE PRAYER

The author of Psalm 141 appears to have been a young man in danger of being influenced by wicked men. But he had the presence of mind and maturity of faith to ask God's help in resisting temptation. The psalmist recognized the attraction and peril for temptation and prayed for deliverance. So he prayed a preventive prayer.

Auto service centers, home maintenance companies, physicians, fitness centers, and others base their services on the saying, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." The auto mechanic who says, "You can pay me now or you can pay me later" strikes an economic nerve that calls us to save money on repairs that we might have prevented. How much more important would that quote be to strike a spiritual nerve that could affect our relationship with God?

A preventive prayer is a wiser prayer than yielding to temptation and then having to turn to the Lord in repentance. It is better to keep temptation at bay, and prayer is an aid in resisting the tempter.

Following the Last Supper and before His crucifixion, Jesus anticipated danger when He visited the garden of Gethsemane with His disciples. He knew suffering and death awaited Him. He realized the disciples would face stern testing. So He asked them to pray with Him. The purpose of preventive prayer is not to remove problems or

temptations but to lay them before God and seek His assistance in handling them.

The disciples didn't understand. They fell asleep despite Jesus' attempts to keep them awake and pray. Mark 14:38 records his instruction to, "Stay awake and pray so that you won't enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Consequently, when the hostile crowd came, they fell into temptation. They deserted Jesus. Peter eventually denied Jesus three times and others hid in fear.

Jesus practiced preventive prayer in the garden. He was overwhelmed with sorrow. He prayed three times for the Father's will to be done. And the Father equipped Him to bear the suffering that followed. Instead of falling into temptation, Jesus faced Pilate, Herod, and the cross. He followed God's will and conquered death and the grave so that all who believe in Him might have an abundant, eternal life.

Preventive prayer has its place in the Christian disciplines. Without the regular habit of communing with God, we are in danger of falling into sin when temptations arise.

SESSION 13

THE LONGING

PSALM 42:1-11

¹ As a **A deer** longs for **B flowing streams**, so I long for you, God. ² I **C thirst for God**, the living God. When can I come and appear before God? ³ My tears have been my food day and night, while all day long people say to me, “Where is your God?” ⁴ I remember this as I pour out my heart: how I **D walked with many**, **E leading** the festive procession to the house of God, with joyful and thankful shouts. ⁵ Why, my soul, are you so dejected? Why are you in such turmoil? Put your **F hope in God**, for I will still praise him, my Savior and my God. ⁶ I am deeply depressed; therefore I remember you from the **G land of Jordan** and the **H peaks of Hermon**, from **I Mount Mizar**. ⁷ Deep calls to deep in the roar of your **J waterfalls**; all your breakers and your billows have swept over me. ⁸ The LORD will send his **K faithful love** by day; his song will be with me in the night—a prayer to the God of my life. ⁹ I will say to God, my **L rock**, “Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about in sorrow because of the enemy’s oppression?” ¹⁰ My adversaries taunt me, as if **M crushing my bones**, while all day long they say to me, “Where is your God?” ¹¹ Why, my soul, are you so dejected? Why are you in such turmoil? Put your hope in God, for I will still praise him, my Savior and my God.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** Of the three species of deer in Palestine (red, fallow, and roe), the reference is to the hart, or the male, red deer.
- b** The usual flowing streams are dried up due to drought; therefore a necessity for physical existence is unavailable.
- c** A necessity for spiritual vitality (God) is unavailable in the eyes of the psalmist.
- d** Recalling past experiences with fellow Israelites in temple events
- e** The psalmist was more than a participant—he was a leader.
- f** A reminder of where the psalmist’s focus must be during dark days
- g** The river forms the geographical separation of the eastern and western tribes of Israel; it rises from the foot of Mount Hermon and flows into the Dead Sea; the Jordan Valley is between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea.
- h** The highest mountain in Syria is 9,100 feet above sea level; it can be seen from as far away as the Dead Sea (120 miles). Its peaks are covered with snow two-thirds of the year.
- i** Literally the “mountain of littleness”
- j** A reminder to the psalmist of his plight; the elements of the waterfall describe the seriousness of his situation and God’s response to his depressed state.
- k** “Steadfast love” (ESV, TLB); “unfailing love” (NLT)
- l** God is our source of strength and security.
- m** “A sword in my bones” (KJV); “a deadly wound in my bones” (ESV)

1. THIRSTY (Ps. 42:1-4)

- The psalmist (Sons of Korah) agonized over his spiritual dryness, remembering the days when he had worshiped joyfully with others at God’s house.
- Note: Characterize the plea of the psalmist in terms of spiritual drought.

2. DROWNING (Ps. 42:5-8)

- The psalmist looked at the overwhelming nature of life and compared it to being swept under by a storm at sea.
- Even in the middle of that storm, the psalmist declared his trust in God.
- Note: Portray these verses as describing the trials of life that kept the psalmist up at night.

3. CRUSHED (Ps. 42:9-11)

- The psalmist declared his allegiance to God even in times when the opposition taunted and questioned the power of God.
- Note: Interpret the “crushing” in terms of physical pain suffered as a result of the verbal attacks (“Where is your God?”) delivered by adversaries.

» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

The hope of God’s presence serves as encouragement during discouraging times.

- Believers should pay attention to their spiritual lives, longing to spend time with God.
- God is always present, even in the most difficult of circumstances.
- Believers can praise God even when they face difficulties and uncertainties.



FOCUS ATTENTION

What keeps you going when the going gets tough?

- Direct the group to expand on true-but-short answers (“responsibilities,” “God,” “devotion”) by urging them to tell how and why and what.
- Don’t probe for overly personal details since once shared, those group members (or ones listening) may hesitate to return to the group. Even groups with habits of personal sharing can create division by sharing certain details.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE PSALM 42:1-4

In agony, the psalmist poured out to God his frustration over his spiritual drought. What pictures did he use? How is listening to God a critical part of praying?

- God wants us to talk with Him no matter what—contentment, sadness, problems to solve, work to do, people to care for, affection to express.
- We’ve all felt how-can-there-be-any-tears-left agony.
- Psalms 42–43 are laments. The lament pattern includes calling on God, the complaint(s), recalling God’s goodness, petitions, divine response, and praise.

Our spiritual lives are not distinct from our daily lives. All matter to God. So how do we attend to our spiritual lives?

- Learn to recognize and respond to God’s voice by talking with Him throughout the day.
- Rather than simply spouting your woes, converse with God, listening as He communicates solutions.

How can we talk about God to hurting friends in helpful ways?

- God—not sayings about Him—gets us through the hard times.
- It’s right to be sad over wrong things.

PSALM 42:5-8

Drowning described the discouragement through which the psalmist walked. How else might this feeling be described? What from the psalmist’s example can help you face times of spiritual dryness in your life?

- Two translations picture sadness in Psalm 42:7: “the tumult of the raging seas” (NLT); and “Your breaking surf, your thundering breakers crash and crush me” (MSG).
- Times of sadness range from the blues, to sadness over illness or other evil, to clinical depression.
- Acknowledge the complex nature of depression—and remember that your group members may not tell you if they are suffering from it.

- Note: Avoid the temptation to offer easy solutions. Be careful not to imply that crying out to God replaces counseling and medication as valuable resources for clinical depression.

What reasons did the psalmist give for continuing? How do these happen for believers today? When are these just parroting truth without effect?

- Repeating truths about God and seeing God as our Rock (vv. 6,9) are two of several ways to keep going despite adversity.

Repeatedly the psalmist asked reasons for his sadness. How much does it help to know the reason? When is doing the next right thing more important than knowing the cause of our distress?

- The NIV translates verse 5, “Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?”
- The psalmist gave “What nows?” including “I will still praise him” (v. 5) and “his song will be with me in the night” (v. 8).

PSALM 42:9-11

What good habits can we cultivate while seeking God’s answers to our prayers?

- Cite differences between ranting and seeking solutions.
- Interspersed affirmations of God’s goodness, presence, and trustworthiness show at least some interchange between the psalmist and God.

How does God use people to supply solutions to our trouble?

- Note: At this point, group members might share on a more personal level.
- Be prepared with your own experience.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

Sadness and problems are parts of our world. That we encounter them doesn’t mean we have done wrong (or right) or that God is punishing us (though He could be). But we do need to respond to those troubles in a Christ-honoring way. What are some appropriate responses to troubles according to Psalms 42–43?

- Read Psalm 43 also, since 42–43 may be parts of one psalm.
- **Personal Challenge:** When we suffer, we must do two things: (1) entrust ourselves to God, and (2) continue doing what is good (1 Pet. 4:19). During each trouble you encounter, focus on some good you can do in spite of the evil you face.

A BADMINTON BIRDIE

Hold up a badminton birdie and let it drop. State: *This world is full of weights that pull us down. Evil is at the root of many of these depressors, but sometimes it's simply the responsibilities of life. Either way we feel the heaviness.* Ask: *How did the psalmist handle this according to Psalm 42:1-4? How do conversations with God lift us back up so we can do what we're meant to do that day? How can we keep such conversations with God from deteriorating into whining?* Guide the group to choose a simple downer—like rush hour traffic—and to speak some prayers about how to manage that weight.

Send the badminton birdie flying, and explain the weighed end of the birdie is also what helps it to fly. Shuttlecocks are designed to fly, travel across the net, and provide enjoyment and exercise. Say: *Even more powerful than weights that pull us down are forces that send us flying. These include both God and the people and ideas He sends.* Ask: *How do actions in verses 5-8 help this happen?* Encourage application of the Scripture rather than just citing phrases (e.g. verse 5: asking, "Why this turmoil?" gives us clues on what to do about it).



Let group members toss the birdie back and forth. Note that to keep a badminton game going players volley the birdie back and forth. It's not a once-and-done lift. Similarly, we manage each weight of life with God's lift again and again. Ask: *Apply to a weight in your life the lifts named in Psalm 42:1-11.*

Close by thanking God for steady lifts that come repeatedly.

DIG DEEPER

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT DEPRESSION?

Many Christians suffering from depression can find hope in biblical foundations. You can also find biblical accounts where certain people experienced depression: Moses (Num. 11:10-16), David (Ps. 51; Ps. 32: 1-5), Elijah (1 Kings 19:1-18), Job, Jonah (Jonah 4:1-11), the psalmist (Ps. 73).

1. We have hope in God.

God encourages us to "call on me in a day of trouble; I will rescue you, and you will honor me" (Ps. 50:15). Hopelessness is one of the hallmark symptoms of depression.

The grace of God in Jesus Christ is the sum of all hope (Col. 1:5-6, 23, 27; 1 Tim. 1:1). "God wanted to make known among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). Paul, a man who had more than his share of tribulation and suffering, proclaimed, "We have put our hope in him that he will deliver us again" (2 Cor. 1:10).

2. We have joy in salvation.

We live in a fallen world, one in which good things come to an end. The tragedy of life will be present until the kingdom of God comes

fully with Jesus' return. The joy of salvation comes from realizing again and again that our sins have been forgiven and that we will live forever with the eternally happy God, who desires we share His joy. We should never grow bored with the gospel.

3. We should show active love for God and others.

Love for God and others is essential because we all at some time or another find ourselves sucked into a vortex of morbid self-involvement, which keeps us from following Christ's teachings:

"'Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?' He said to him, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.'" (Matt. 22:36-40)

When we begin to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and demonstrate love to others, we find true hope in God's active love.

BIG DECISIONS AND LITTLE CHOICES



by Michael Kelley

Life is about making decisions. Most of the decisions we make we don't really pay attention to; we choose what radio station to listen to, what to eat for dinner, or what movie to go see. We don't spend hours agonizing over decisions like that; the choice presents itself, and we make it, and most of the time we just carry on with our days.

There are those times though when the decisions seem bigger—we have to choose a career, a home, or a spouse. These are the kinds of decisions that keep us up at night; they move us to seek council from others and carefully weigh out the options.

Big or small, we are always deciding something. But the big and the small are not isolated from each other. In fact every small decision reflects a larger one.

In other words, life is about big decisions actualized in little choices. Here's an example:

Marriage is a big decision. In a moment, you commit before God and others to honor your husband or wife, no matter what may come. You promise to be faithful and cherish them throughout whatever life throws at you, whether rich or poor or sickness or health. That's a big decision. But today, you have the chance to actualize that decision in a ton of little ways. Will you ask caring questions about your spouse's daily activities and feelings? Will you serve him or her by doing the household chore he or she hates to do? Will you put down your phone or remote and listen to him or her earnestly and genuinely? All these little choices are just a reflection of the bigger decision you've already made.

You can look at any small daily choice like this. If you want to filter it through this dynamic, then just ask yourself: What is the larger decision behind the smaller choice you're making right now? In fact, you can actually hold up this dynamic to your faith.

Believing in Jesus? That's a big decision. It's all-encompassing. It changes everything. But it's a big decision lived out in little choices. So when we come to 1 Peter 4, we see many small choices that we have to make on a moment by moment basis:

- Love each other.
- Be hospitable.
- Don't complain.
- Use your gift.
- Speak in a godly way.
- Serve in God's strength.

They might seem like little choices, but each one of them is founded in the big decision that a Christian makes over and over again—to repent and believe in Jesus. Let us not, then, be the people of big decisions only. Let us instead be the people whose small choices reflect in a myriad of ways our bigger decision to declare that Jesus is Lord.

Michael Kelley is a Christ-follower, author, speaker, and director of Groups Ministry at LifeWay Christian Resources. He is married to Jana and they have three children: Joshua, Andi, and Christian. Read more from Michael on his blog michaelkelley.co.

7 TERRIBLE WAYS TO READ YOUR BIBLE

by Philip Nation

Many people periodically renew their commitment to regular Bible reading. It is a commitment that I've made numerous times as well ... with varying results. But, as we all know, as a Christian, you must regularly engage with the Bible if you plan to mature in your faith.

1. *Set an unrealistic goal.* Make sure you try to go from barely picking up your Bible to understanding the nuances of Ezekiel in the first week of the year.
2. *Punish yourself for not reading enough.* Since you were so bad at it last year, heap guilt upon your mind and soul. It's a key motivator for behavior modification.
3. *Choose a translation you've never used before.* Since you're challenging yourself, get a translation (ancient or modern) that is totally unfamiliar. This way, not only will you lapse in the amount of reading, but you'll also confuse yourself in what you are reading.
4. *Read in bed just before you fall asleep.* Using those final few moments of consciousness to study Scripture will insure you drift off to sleep mid-passage and forget most of what you read.
5. *Read to find biblical factoids.* Make sure you discover random facts about Bible stories and characters so you can impress your fellow Bible study members. You'll be ready for questions like: "Who knows the name of the servant who had his ear cut off by Simon Peter?"
6. *Separate prayer from Bible reading.* You're smart and can figure out the Bible all on your own. Make sure you hold off on prayer until some other time.
7. *Make up for lost time.* Since you slacked off last year, you need to do some serious catching up. Make sure you try to read at least 23 chapters a day.

Now that I've got your attention, let me encourage you to *do none of those things*. Instead, have a combination of joy, sincerity, and expectation about reading the Bible. Our God has revealed Himself to us in the Scriptures and longs for you to know Him. Find a comfortable pace, and enjoy the journey ahead as you read the Bible. Drop the need to be smarter than everyone else about it all, and just be a disciple. That's all Jesus asked of you anyway.

Philip Nation is pastor of First Baptist Church of Bradenton in Bradenton, Florida.

COMING NEXT QUARTER

EXODUS; LEVITICUS

- Session 1** **Reluctance** > *Exodus 3:4-14; 4:13-16*
- Session 2** **Confrontation** > *Exodus 7:1-13*
- Session 3** **Liberation** > *Exodus 12:1-13*
- Session 4** **Victory** > *Exodus 14:13-28*
- Session 5** **Sufficient** > *Exodus 16:1-5,11-20*
- Session 6** **Commanded** > *Exodus 20:1-17*
- Session 7** **Equipped** > *Exodus 25:1-9; 31:1-6*
- Session 8** **Rebellion** > *Exodus 32:1-6,11-14*
- Session 9** **His Presence** > *Exodus 39:42-43; 40:4,34-38*
- Session 10** **Set Before** > *Leviticus 1:3-9; 2:1-3; 3:1-5*
- Session 11** **Set Apart** > *Leviticus 9:15-24; 10:1-3*
- Session 12** **Set Free** > *Leviticus 16:3-10,29-30*
- Session 13** **Set Futures** > *Leviticus 26:3-16,40-45*

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