

RCC

Women's Ministry

2018 / 2019

You are my
HIDING PLACE

and my

SHIELD;

I hope in your

WORD

PSALM 119:114

pursing GOD

Psalms & 1 John

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 1: Psalm 25

Author's Preface ~

Welcome to Virtue Bible Study! You are about to embark on a journey that will take you up close and personal with others who preceded you and wrote about their experiences under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Like you, the psalmists went in search of God and found Him! Like them, you will keep a record of your thoughts, feelings, and actions this year as you study God's Word.

This course will challenge you to designate a specific time—place—and plan that you will maintain as a priority. Remember, you will only receive from your study of God's Word what you are willing to put into it. Determine now to study a portion of your lesson each day throughout the week. During your quiet time with the Lord you will be asked to *Listen—Learn—and Live* what you personally glean from your study of Psalms. The purpose of this type of study format is to lead you to listen to the Lord's voice, learn the lesson of the passage and then live it out in your daily life. It is giving *attention* with *intention* to obey what God is saying. The goal of your investment in God's Word is to experience for yourself the great adventure of knowing Him in a personal way.

For centuries people have turned to the Book of Psalms for the counsel, courage, and comfort to meet life's challenges. Our series this year, *In Step with the Psalms*, will open up to every serious-minded Bible student an access to God that is both familiar and fulfilling; where you can experience firsthand God's faithfulness and friendship.

As you set out to follow in the footsteps of the psalmists, you will find yourself relating to their circumstances, thinking their thoughts, and feeling their emotions as they came to grips with life and to a deeply profound understanding of God's Person, providence, and power. This awe-inspiring collection of poetry speaks *to us* and *for us* today just as it did when they were composed centuries earlier. So get ready to walk *your* appointed path this year and be led into an encounter with the living God that will transform your walk into one that overflows with prayer and worship!

*Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,'
whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left.*

Isaiah 30:21

Psalm 25

A Plea for Deliverance and Forgiveness

A Psalm of David.

NKJV

- 1 To You, O LORD, I lift up my soul.
2 O my God, I trust in You; Let me not be ashamed;
Let not my enemies triumph over me.
3 Indeed, let no one who waits on You be ashamed;
Let those be ashamed who deal treacherously without cause.
- 4 Show me Your ways, O LORD;
Teach me Your paths.
5 Lead me in Your truth and teach me,
For You are the God of my salvation;
On You I wait all the day.
- 6 Remember, O LORD, Your tender mercies and Your lovingkindnesses,
For they are from of old.
7 Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions;
According to Your mercy remember me, For Your goodness' sake, O LORD.
- 8 Good and upright is the LORD;
Therefore He teaches sinners in the way.
9 The humble He guides in justice,
And the humble He teaches His way.
10 All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth,
To such as keep His covenant and His testimonies.
11 For Your name's sake, O LORD,
Pardon my iniquity, for it is great.
- 12 Who is the man that fears the LORD?
Him shall He teach in the way He chooses.
13 He himself shall dwell in prosperity,
And his descendants shall inherit the earth.
14 The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him,
And He will show them His covenant.
15 My eyes are ever toward the LORD,
For He shall pluck my feet out of the net.
- 16 Turn Yourself to me, and have mercy on me,
For I am desolate and afflicted.
17 The troubles of my heart have enlarged;
Bring me out of my distresses!
18 Look on my affliction and my pain,
And forgive all my sins.
19 Consider my enemies, for they are many;
And they hate me with cruel hatred.
20 Keep my soul, and deliver me; Let me not be ashamed, for I put my trust in You.
21 Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, For I wait for You.
- 22 Redeem Israel, O God, Out of all their troubles!

Did you know ~

The title *Psalms* literally means the “book of praises” or “songs of praises.” The word *Psalter* is a reference to the book containing 150 psalms, the longest book in the Bible. C.S. Lewis called the book of Psalms a “Temple collection,” meaning that the Jewish Temple was the library containing the nation’s archived collections of poetry, music, and art. These praise songs were the hymns that were sung three times each year when all the Jewish men traveled with their families to the Temple to worship God. Seventy-three of the psalms are attributed to David, a poet, musician, and the one who organized the singers and musicians for the Temple worship.

Stay on the Path ~

The estimated date of writing for Psalm 25 is uncertain but the author is definitely David—the shepherd boy—who ultimately became the greatest king of Israel. Most scholars agree that this psalm was written at some point during Absalom’s rebellion, when David’s favored son betrayed his father, turning the family and the nation of Israel against their anointed king. What is clear is that David wrote out of desperation, pleading with the Lord to *lead him—forgive him—and deliver him* out of great turmoil and distress.

Prayer isn’t something that’s natural—it’s supernatural—a learned spiritual behavior that is wrought out of necessity: our necessity to involve an omnipotent, omniscient God in our ordinary everyday lives, and in so doing, life becomes extraordinary! As you read through Psalm 25, you will notice that David grouped his thoughts into two distinct repeated themes: prayer (vv.1-7); meditation (vv.8-10); prayer (v.11); meditation (vv.12-15); and prayer (vv.16-22). Three times David prayed and woven between his prayers are his meditations about God’s character and His faithfulness.

Listen to the psalm ~

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read Psalm 25:1-22.

Put a psalm in your heart ~ (Memory verse) **Psalm 25:10**

(Write out the verse in the space below. Practice it each time you open your lesson.)

*All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, to such as keep His covenant
and His testimonies.*

Learn the lessons of the psalm ~

1. Your help comes from God ~ vv. 1-7

When the storms of life bear down making it difficult to cope, where do you turn? David prayed. He humbly talked to God and then trusted Him to act based on His character and His promises. As a boy alone caring for his father's sheep, David learned to trust God at an early age. He depended on Him for His protection and provision. In return for God's presence, David composed songs that reflected the ups and downs of life and the satisfaction of sharing it all with the Lord. Their relationship was one forged through the intimacy of being together through joy and sorrow, the result according David the highest of commendations: *"I have found David son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will"* (Acts 13:22). It is a title that becomes a quest for every Spirit-filled believer who sincerely desires God's will and purpose above their own. The potential is realized when God sees one of His children with bended knees and a humbled heart.

1. Why does David the psalmist need God's help?

2. With what attitude of heart does David turn to God?

The close relationship between David and the Lord is visible in David's choice of address: *To You, O Lord* and *O my God*. It is to the One who truly cares for him that David confidently says, *I lift up my soul*. David's attention is fixed on the Lord, knowing that evil would not triumph over the one who trusts in God.

3. Why will evil not triumph over one of God's children? vv. 2-3; 20

It isn't possible to be completely confident in the Lord without also being submissive to Him. It is most often during our times of greatest adversity that we as His children become keenly aware of our dependence upon Him. With a steadfast trust in God, David moves from a plea for divine intervention to a prayer for divine direction.

4. David desires to behave and respond in a manner that pleases God during his trial. Finish the following:

a. "Show me" – (v. 4) _____

b. "Teach me" – (v. 4) _____

c. "Lead me" – (v. 5) _____

David prays, *show me. . .teach me. . .lead me. . .teach me*, with an attitude of submission that suggests obedience to every aspect of God's will. All the day long David puts his hope in God, but David also needs to be forgiven of his sin.

5. On the basis of what two aspects of God's character does David make his plea for forgiveness? vv. 6–7

a. What does he ask God *not* to remember?

David prays for the mercy and love of God—for *they are from of old*. It is a reference to God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

b. What did David know about God's love and mercy?

- Psalm 103:17–18

- Psalm 143:5

The prayer for forgiveness is on the grounds of God's own goodness and faithfulness to His people: *According to Your mercy, remember me, for Your goodness' sake, O Lord* (v. 7).

c. There is one other aspect of God's character upon which David bases his plea for forgiveness—what is it? v. 11

d. David is confident in God's mercy based on God's own character. What does he say about this in Psalm 23:3?

God's mercy and love are His commitment to those who love Him, those who have a relationship with Him; on this basis there is no limit!

Touchpoint ~

Are *you* in need of God's mercy today? Once you ask and receive God's forgiveness, He remembers your sin no more. You are justified in His sight and can say: "It is just as if I'd never sinned!" Take a moment now to meditate on Jeremiah 31:33–34. The "new covenant" mentioned in these verses is not mere knowledge of God, but rather a relationship that is based on a heart experience of divine grace. The Holy Spirit imparts to each believer the assurance that they have become a part of the family of God through the forgiveness of sins. Please share your thoughts.

II. *You can trust God's character ~ Review vv. 8–14.*

The Bible teaches there are rewards for those who choose the paths of wisdom, obedience, and godliness. In this next section of text we see divine love on display so that sinners may learn God's ways and respond to Him.

1. In your own words identify the qualities of God's character that prompt Him to display His loving acts to His children.

Thinking now beyond himself, David considers the blessings that come to others just like him who are in need of God's grace. The Lord is *good* and *upright*; therefore He teaches His way to sinners (v. 8).

2. The "humble" are sinners who have submitted to God and are in a covenant relationship with Him. What does David declare about them?
 - a. v. 12
 - b. v. 13
 - c. v. 14

The instruction disclosed by the words *He teaches—He guides—He teaches* (vv. 8–9), are the answer to David's plea in verses 4–5. When a sinner enters into a relationship with God, that individual is set on a path of discipleship that instructs him in the "ways of the Lord." David goes on to make a stunning declaration to the disciple following after God: *From now on every road you travel will take you to God. Follow the Covenant signs; read the charted directions* (25:10 The Message).

Obedience means coming to God regularly to ask for His forgiveness: *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:8–9). Always remember to keep short accounts with God; come often to the throne of grace, asking Him to search your heart and reveal anything that might separate you from Him! God initiates and we respond to His way. Reverence of this kind means the blessing is passed on to future generations (v. 13).

3. What personal privilege is there for those who fear God? v. 14

The *fear of the Lord* does not refer to being afraid of incurring His judgment or wrath; rather it speaks of a wholesome dread of displeasing Him. It means with the whole heart, mind, and spirit, making it your aim to be well-pleasing to Him. It is this person that God takes into His confidence.

4. What more do you learn about this kind of intimacy from John 15:14–16?

a. What do you see in these verses about God's ways—His appointed path for you?
John 15:16

b. How does Ephesians 2:10 add to your understanding?

Touchpoint ~

As you learn more about the kind of relationship God desires you to have with Him, how does this knowledge affect your perspective?

Pause & ponder ~

Remember (Hebrew *zakar*) vv. 6-7: to contemplate or bring to remembrance. Three times in Psalm 25 David asks the Lord to remember him. It is a reference of God calling on Himself to act on His promises on behalf of His servant. (Exodus 2:24; 6:5-6; Psalm 98:3; Psalm 105:8.) The remembrance of God's faithfulness to His promises should motivate us to respond in a way that puts Him first in our life. Pause and ponder the mercy of God and how you can put Him in remembrance today. See Psalm 20:7-8.

Keep (Hebrew *shamar*) v. 20: to put a hedge around something or to set a watch over. It is used over four hundred times in the Old Testament. In the book of Psalms it speaks of God's watchful eye over His people with the intention to act on their behalf. Pause and ponder what God promises to do for you in Psalm 121:3-4 and 7-8. Record your thoughts.

III. God will deliver you ~ Review vv. 15-22.

Rather than fixating on his circumstances, David's eyes were fixed on the Lord, confident that He would deliver David out of the traps set for him by his enemy (v. 15). The remaining verses of Psalm 25 form short prayers for David's deliverance. His petitions are encased between affirmations of his trust in the Lord.

1. Look closely at verses 15-22, making note of the words David uses to make his plea for deliverance.

David hopes in faith that God will intervene, returning at the end of the psalm to where he began his prayer.

2. Point to a verse and/or expression where David declares his dependence upon God. (There is no right or wrong answer, this will be entirely subjective.)

Whatever crisis David was dealing with at the time, he took time and pains to fervently ask God to keep [guard] his soul and rescue him from the threat of his enemies. He ends his personal prayer by offering up an intercessory prayer on behalf of his nation, for God to rescue Israel from all her troubles.

Live the psalm ~

Once you have listened to the psalm and explored the lessons outlined in your study guide, the last step is to look for a singular *Take-away-truth* that you will purpose to apply to your daily life. There can be more than one truth that you have gleaned, but select the one that stands out to you the most and document it below.

Pray the psalm ~

The book of Psalms was the prayer book of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is most often quoted by more New Testament writers than any other book in Scripture. The words and imagery of these songs do not attempt a social, political or even theological correctness; rather they teach us to come just as we are and to engage in “straight talk” with God—holding nothing back. As we enter God’s presence, we are but a prayer away from enjoying the same intimate relationship David had with Him.

Each week you’ll be given the opportunity to apply an aspect of the psalm to your life by praying it through. Remember that for every sigh there is a psalm. It will lead you into a dimension of worship where you will experience a depth to your prayers as your faith continues to grow.

Select a verse or verses—or your *Take-away-truth* from Psalm 25 and pray it back to God. Be specific in your personal request. Record the essence of your prayer in the space below, date it, and then wait in faith for the answer.

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 2: Psalm 96

The Lord Reigns!

Stay on the Path ~

Psalm 96 presents the reader with both the invitation and the inspiration to worship the God of all creation. “Oh sing, sing, sing” the Scripture says, but why should we sing and what are we to sing about? Why can’t we just verbally utter our words of praise and leave it at that? Could it be that God knows how often our words become automatic and meaningless when instead they should overflow with heartfelt emotion and expression? When set to harmonic melodies and instruments of praise, songs have a way of lifting our eyes toward heaven and touching the innermost parts of our being. And the more we express our feelings and emotions in song, the more our hearts open wide to the Lord!

Statistics have shown that for most people the act of standing on a stage in front of an audience with a microphone in hand is the most terrifying thought they can imagine. For the believer, it can be the most exhilarating experience to realize that we sing for an audience of one—the One—and all we have to do is *give a joyful noise unto the Lord!* The question becomes: do I really believe what I am singing? Consider that as you work your way through Psalm 96 and remember that Creator God—the Maker of heaven and earth—has summoned *you* to come before Him and *sing—to Him, about Him, and for Him!*

Did you know ~

The worship psalms were known as the “songs of Zion.” They were used primarily for the pilgrimage up to the Temple in Jerusalem and temple worship. These particular psalms tell of God’s presence dwelling among His people. References to His visible presence can be found throughout the Old Testament as being represented in the form of *light*—known in the Hebrew by the word *shekinah*—or “glory.” This helps the reader to understand the importance these worship songs played in the daily service of worship.

Psalm 96

A Song of Praise to God Coming in Judgment

- 1 Oh, sing to the Lord a new song!
Sing to the Lord, all the earth.
- 2 Sing to the Lord, bless His name;
proclaim the good news of
His salvation from day to day.
- 3 Declare His glory among the nations,
His wonders among all peoples.

- 4 For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised;
He is to be feared above all gods.
- 5 For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
but the Lord made the heavens.
- 6 Honor and majesty are before Him;
strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.

- 7 Give to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
give to the Lord glory and strength.
- 8 Give to the Lord the glory due His name;
bring an offering, and come into His courts.
- 9 Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!
Tremble before Him, all the earth.

- 10 Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns;
the world also is firmly established,
it shall not be moved;
He shall judge the peoples righteously."
- 11 Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;
let the sea roar, and all its fullness;
- 12 Let the field be joyful, and all that is in it.
Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice before the Lord.
- 13 For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth.
He shall judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with His truth.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read Psalm 96:1-13.

Listen to the psalm ~ First impressions

What is the *tone* of the psalm? What stands out to you from your initial reading?

What motivates *you* to worship the Lord?

What type of worship songs do *you* most enjoy singing?

Put a psalm in your heart ~ (Memory verse) **Psalm 96:2**

(Write out the verse in the spaces below. Practice it each time you open your lesson.)

*Sing to the Lord, bless His name; proclaim the good news of
His salvation from day to day.*

Learn the lessons of the psalm ~

Selah (Think about): *How* and *why* God’s people are to praise Him; what prompts the believer’s worship; the potential influence or impact of worship on the world.

I. His good news is salvation ~ vv. 1–3

The three-fold call to “sing to the Lord” is in direct symmetry with three commands found in these opening verses: “praise” (literally to “bless”), “proclaim” (literally “good news”), and “declare” (to “tell”).

1. According to vv. 1–3, what do God’s people have to sing about?
 - a. “Sing to the Lord” –

 - b. “Proclaim” –

 - c. “Declare” –

Whenever God does a work on behalf of His children, there is reason to bless His name. The “new song” refers to a new work or fresh blessing of God’s grace. Scholars believe that Psalm 96 was sung during the dedication of the second temple when the Jews returned to Jerusalem from their exile and captivity in Babylon. As the people took a look back at their deliverance and new life, they found reason to sing.

Touchpoint ~

When was the last time you thanked God for His saving grace on your behalf—your *new life* in Christ? Has He opened a *new door* of opportunity for you? Have you received a *new beginning* of some sort; perhaps a new blessing? Please acknowledge it in the space below and take a moment to thank Him.

II. *He is great* ~ vv. 4–6

The psalmist now sets forth the explicit reasons God is to be praised.

1. What are those reasons?

v. 4

v. 5

v. 6

God is to be greatly praised and feared above all other gods because He alone is great! All other man-made, so-called gods amount to no more than false idols. What is an idol? Anything that you allow to take priority in your life—anything that you allow to come in between you and your relationship with God. Idols do not have to be stone statues, they can be a love of money, a person, a habit, a job—you name it.

Touchpoint ~

Take a few minutes to meditate on Psalm 115:1–8. Read these verses through several times and let the truth sink in: *Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them* (v. 8). In other words, you become like the one you worship! Does the Lord occupy first place in your life? Do you need to do some re-arranging? If the Lord has pointed out someone or something you have set up as an idol, confess it right now.

The idols you set up in your heart only *take from you*—they do not give back to you. Remember that the next time you are tempted to give first place to anyone or anything other than your great God!

2. By comparison to the idols set up by those who do not give God His rightful place, notice the four virtues ascribed to the Lord in Psalm 96:6. Name them below. The more you worship God, the more you open up your heart to become like Him. Think about what you can do with these attributes as you take on more of the Lord's likeness. Please share your thoughts.

III. He alone is worthy ~ vv. 7–9

The invitation to worship God does not extend to the Jews alone; it goes out to the families of all peoples and nations—think about it! The Gentiles were a part of God’s original plan of salvation by grace (see Ephesians 1:4–14).

The three commands to “give to the Lord” (vv. 7–8) directly correspond to the three-fold command to “sing” (vv. 1–2) in the psalm. God’s people give Him glory because He alone is worthy. Each time we come through the doors of God’s sanctuary, we bring with us the sacrifice of praise that is so pleasing to Him.

1. There is a condition mentioned that accompanies the command to worship in verse 9. What do the words: “in the beauty of holiness” really mean?

2. How does Psalm 24:3–5 add to your understanding of this passage? Do you meet this condition?

Touchpoint ~

What offering does the Lord desire you to bring with you when you come to worship? A bowed head, lifted hands, a humble heart—all are acts accompanying worship, but the greatest gift you can give to the One who is worthy is that of a surrendered life! *I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God* (Romans 12:1–2).

Personal: Have you ever made a complete surrender to God for the gift of His Son on the cross for you? If you’d like to, you may do so right now by praying these words: “Father, I confess that I am a sinner in need of Your forgiveness today. Please wash me clean in the shed blood of Christ and fill me with Your Holy Spirit. Then I can worship You in a manner that is worthy of Your name. Amen.” (If you prayed this prayer, share it with someone and proclaim the good news that God saves!

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!’

Revelation 5:11–12

IV. He is coming to judge the earth ~ vv. 10–13

These final verses of Psalm 96 contain a passionate call for all of God's people to "say among the nations"—or "proclaim"—that He reigns and that He is coming to judge the earth. Do you really believe this truth and are you telling others about it?

1. Since the Lord sits enthroned above the earth, what do these verses say about the following:
 - a. His creation

 - b. His judgment

 - c. His truth

The psalmist looks ahead to the day when all creation will praise the Lord together. The celebration of His sovereign rule will take place when Christ returns to judge the world in righteousness. The anticipation of His coming and the reward of the righteous are the confident hope of every believer who worships Him in spirit and in truth.

Pause & ponder ~

We must differentiate between God's call upon a person's life to be an *evangelist* versus every believer's responsibility to *evangelize*. God calls some to be His spokesperson. However, every Christian walking the face of the earth is called to share God's Good News of *salvation* coupled with their own personal testimony to those within their sphere of influence. Who are the people around you that need God's saving grace right now?

God. . . commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.

Acts 17:30b–31

Live the psalm ~

Worship is not only the verbal proclamation of praising God from our lips; it is the inward transformation of God's saving grace upon our lives, bearing witness to the world! How will this realization motivate you to live in a way that glorifies God?

Pray the psalm ~

Select a verse or combination of verses from Psalm 96 and pray it back to God. Be specific in your personal request or your intercession on behalf of someone you know that needs Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. Record your prayer in the space below, date it, and then wait in faith for the answer.

“Lord, help me to look up at You and beyond my circumstances today to focus on the certainty that You are returning to the earth You created. I am reminded again to thank You for the gift of my salvation. Help me to demonstrate my appreciation by obeying You and living for Your glory! Amen”

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 3: Psalm 23

Our Good and Gracious Shepherd

Stay on the Path ~

The story is told of two gentlemen who were called on to recite Psalm 23—the Shepherd’s Psalm—one evening in a church service. The first man had the reputation for being a skilled actor and great orator, repeating the psalm with stunning eloquence. The second man was elderly, requiring the use of a cane to assist him in mounting the platform steps to approach the microphone. He began to repeat the words of Psalm 23 from memory but, unlike the first man who had received thunderous applause, there was a strange hush that fell over the crowd as the man returned to his seat. Breaking the silence that had filled the room, the first gentleman returned to the podium and expressed to the audience with awe, “I may know the Shepherd’s Psalm, but I now realize that this great man knows the psalm’s Shepherd!”

The sweetest note ever sounded in the believer’s ears is the assurance that we know and belong to the One Great Shepherd of our souls. When we are able to move beyond trendy notions, religious rituals, and cultural mandates into the dynamic personal relationship for which we were created, then we will finally be satisfied as sheep belonging to the Shepherd’s fold. When we learn to follow the voice of our Shepherd, we will experientially know that He alone is sufficient to meet our every need, whatever the circumstances that come our way.

Did you know ~

The Book of Psalms is a vast volume of exquisite insights into what it means to think and feel as a human being. The highs and lows, joys and despairs of life allow the reader to discover and explore one’s own feelings and emotions. This does not mean that every emotion on display is to be emulated, but rather that we can glean and learn from them. “The first great value of this Book of Psalms is that it provides for our emotions and feelings the same kind of guidance as other Scriptures provide for our faith and actions” (J. Sidlow Baxter). Since all of life belongs to God, our emotions as well as our behavior should be submitted to His rule as Lord over all.

“In these busy days, it would be greatly to the spiritual profit of Christians if they were more familiar with the Book of Psalms, in which they would find a complete armory for life’s battles, and a perfect supply for life’s needs” (Charles Spurgeon).

Psalm 23

The Lord the Shepherd of His People
A Psalm of David

1 The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.

2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.

3 He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
for His name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me
In the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall
Follow me all the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house
of the Lord forever.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read Psalm 23:1-6.

Listen to the psalm ~ First impressions

What is the *tone* of the psalm? What stands out to you from your initial reading?

Does *your* Christian walk currently demonstrate a total trust in the Lord to provide all of life's needs? What immediately comes to mind?

Put a psalm in your heart ~ (Memory verse) **Psalm 23:6**

(Write out the verse in the spaces below. Practice it each time you open your lesson.)

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and
I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

Learn the lessons of the psalm ~

Selah (Think about): Psalm 23 (referred to as the “pearl of the psalms”) is the most often read, quoted, recited, and memorized portion of Scripture. Think of the ways this psalm has been used to comfort and encourage many people in their time of need.

I. He is our Good Shepherd ~ vv. 1–3

As far as sheep go, it isn’t exactly complimentary to compare God’s people to lowly sheep but that is precisely what the Bible repeatedly does. Sheep cannot do anything for themselves—they are completely helpless, defenseless creatures, dependent entirely upon their shepherd for all of their needs. Understanding the attributes and actions of sheep reveals some striking similarities to human beings and we cannot help but be amused by them.

In ancient Israel, a shepherd did not punch a time-clock, he lived twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week outdoors in the sheepfold with the sheep: nurturing, guiding, protecting, and calling each one by name. It was considered the lowliest of all forms of work—the hours were long, the chores were dirty, and there was no one there to pat the shepherd on the back for a job well done. David understood that; he wasn’t born into royalty. He wrote this psalm much later in life after becoming king, but the road leading him there was to be very dangerous and take him many years.

David was the youngest of eight sons (1 Samuel 16), the last one in line to be considered for attention. He often spent his days and nights tending to his father’s flocks. It was those hours in the field as a boy that would later inspire him to look back and use the analogy of the shepherd caring for his sheep as he penned Psalm 23. David transferred the image of a loving, nurturing, caring shepherd to God and, appropriately, the image of a flock of helpless wandering sheep to God’s people. David went on to model his leadership of God’s people by what he knew of God personally. In Psalm 78:70–72, the scripture records: *He [God] chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes that had young He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of His heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands.*

1. What do the following verses in the Book of Psalms say about God’s role as shepherd of His people and what about their response (where indicated)?
 - a. Psalm 78:52–53a
 - b. Psalm 79:13
 - c. Psalm 80:1
 - d. Psalm 95:7
 - e. Psalm 100:3–5

2. Read through John 10:1–30. In it you will find the promised Messiah represented as a loving shepherd. Notice the totality and perfection of this Shepherd’s work toward His beloved sheep. (Our Shepherd knows what we need even before we ask Him.) What do you learn from these verses regarding:

- The actions of the Good Shepherd?

- The action of His sheep?

Sheep are interesting animals, they are not driven from behind, they are led; they respond to voice command. While often different flocks are housed mixed together in one sheepfold for the night, one of the shepherds will lie down across the open door to protect the flock from intruders. At first daylight, all the shepherds appear to call forth their sheep and, even though the flocks are mingled, each sheep will respond only to the voice of its own shepherd.

Pause & ponder ~

There are many voices calling at you from every conceivable direction each and every day. The question is: whose voice do *you* listen to—that of your Shepherd or those of the world? On a scale of 1–10, with 10 being best, how quick are you to recognize the voice of your Shepherd when He is speaking to you through His Word? Please explain.

Can *you* honestly say in your heart as David did: “The Lord is *my* shepherd”? You can if you call out to Him today!

Touchpoint ~

A closer look at the phrase, “the Lord is my shepherd” (v.1) reveals the verb is in the present tense and could better be translated “the Lord *is* shepherding me.” In other words, He is right now at work providing, protecting, nurturing, caring, and guiding us to our destination. All of the Old Testament names of the Lord are an indication of His ongoing oversight of every aspect and detail concerning His people. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ refers to believers as “My sheep” because the Father gave us to Him (John 17:12) and because He willingly laid down His life for us.

The following exercise will give you the opportunity to cross-reference the shepherding care promised to God’s people in Psalm 23 with the covenant names of Jehovah God. Look up the Old Testament references that correspond to the verses in Psalm 23 and, in your own words, personalize what God does for you as the result of your covenant relationship with Him. The first one is done for you as an example.

<u>Psalm 23</u>	<u>God’s Name</u>	<u>My Blessing</u>
v.1–2: <i>I shall not want; He makes me to lie down in green pastures</i>	Genesis 22:14 – <u>Jehovah-Jireh</u>	<u><i>He will provide for me</i></u>
v. 2: <i>He leads me beside still waters</i>	Judges 6:24 – <u>Jehovah-Shalom</u>	_____
v. 3: <i>He restores my soul</i>	Exodus 15:26 – <u>Jehovah-Rophe</u>	_____
v. 3: <i>He leads me in the paths of righteousness</i>	Jeremiah 33:16 – <u>Jehovah-Tsidkenu</u>	_____
v. 4: <i>Yea, though I walk through the valley. . . You are with me</i>	Ezekiel 48:35 – <u>Jehovah-Shammah</u>	_____
v. 5: <i>You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies</i>	Exodus 17:15 – <u>Jehovah-Nissi</u>	_____
v. 5: <i>You anoint my head with oil</i>	Leviticus 20:8 – <u>Jehovah-M’Kaddesh</u>	_____

Abundance, rest, protection, restoration, keeping to the right path—all these are the responsibility of the shepherd. To take it further, David states that the shepherd is able to go above and beyond to protect his sheep as they face moments of great need and peril.

II. *He is our Gracious Host* ~ vv. 4–6

Here the metaphor shifts from a shepherd with his flock to that of a gracious host meeting the needs of his traveling guest so they will lack nothing. The pronoun also transitions from David talking *about* God to him talking directly *with* God. Surrounded by his enemies, David is confident that God is working all things together for his good.

1. What brought David comfort and freedom from fear in the face of his enemies?
 - a. Do a little investigating on your own to discover what the *rod* and the *staff* were used for and note your findings below.

2. The act of anointing the head with oil (v.5) was to symbolize the heart being revived in the face of great need. What difference would the certainty of God's presence make?

The overflowing cup (v.5) signified the abundant supply of God's divine grace (that which is beautiful and pleasant) in every situation. Here the expression is used to convey David's confidence that God would forever show him favor based on His covenant love.

3. As a result, what was David's final triumphant declaration? v.6

Pause & ponder ~

Take a moment to meditate on Romans 8:28–39, which clearly states the certainty of a believer's relationship with God *now* as well as their future hope. What in these verses conveys the assurance of comfort and confidence toward God that you need most today?

Live the psalm ~

Select one of the verses from your study of Psalm 23 and share how it will affect your perspective? How can you apply this verse to your life this week?

Pray the psalm ~

David, the shepherd-king of Israel prayed the words of Psalm 23 to the Lord—the One who exemplified everything that a true shepherd is to his sheep. Record your prayer in the space below, date it, and then wait in faith for the answer.

Whether in the pasture, in the fold, or through the valley, the sheep's path ultimately leads to the Father's house where God's flock will dwell with Him and forever sing His praises!

... For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Revelation 7:17

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 4: Psalm 42

When God Shows Up!

Stay on the Path ~

“If God is all-knowing, almighty, and everywhere present at once, then why does He seem to be missing-in-action when I need Him the most?” How many of us have asked ourselves that question at one time or another, perhaps even more than once? The composer of Psalm 42 was facing tremendous persecution from his outward enemies and discouragement and depression from his inward feelings and emotions. He seemed to be moving further away from God, which led him to write about his desperate need for Him. Working through a process of self-examination, he was prompted to choose praise over doubt, with the result being he was able to encourage his soul and renew his hope in God.

Perhaps you’re facing a similar situation today, wondering where in the world God is while looking for a way out. Be careful—the enemy of your soul will try to offer you a tempting alternative detour that is perhaps an all too familiar road. When you see it, don’t take it! The detour may seem shorter and easier, offering you temporary relief, but it can actually be more hazardous and dangerous than the path the Lord has marked out for you. When you follow after God, you have His promise that “a man’s heart plans his way but the Lord directs his steps” (Proverbs 16:9). Keep your eyes focused upward and stay alert; God’s way is safer than any familiar road you have traveled in the past. His path is marked with exclamation points (the principles and promises of scripture), not question marks!

Did you know ~

Lament psalms comprise the biggest portion of the Psalter—approximately one-third of the entire book. They are poems that address a specific happening or occasion. The ingredients of a lament psalm consist of an introductory cry to God of great need, a development of the crisis circumstances, the detailed prayer offered, and the confident declaration of trust in God followed by praises lifted to Him.

Psalm 42

To the Chief Musician
A Contemplation of the sons of Korah

- 1 As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So my soul pants for You, O God.
- 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and appear before God?
- 3 My tears have been my food day and night,
While they continually say to me,
“Where is your God?”
- 4 When I remember these things,
I pour out my soul within me.
For I used to go with the multitude;
I went with them to the house of God,
With the voice of joy and praise,
With a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast.
- 5 Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him
For the help of His countenance.
- 6 O my God, my soul is cast down within me;
Therefore I will remember You
from the land of the Jordan,
And from the heights of Hermon,
from the Hill Mizar.
- 7 Deep calls unto deep at the
noise of Your waterfalls;
All Your waves and billows
have gone over me.

8 The Lord will command His lovingkindness
in the daytime,
And in the night His song shall be with me—
A prayer to the God of my life.

9 I will say to God my Rock,
“Why have You forgotten me?
Why do I go mourning because of
the oppression of the enemy?”

10 As with a breaking of my bones,
My enemies reproach me,
While they say to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”

11 Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him,
The help of my countenance and my God.

Scripture from the New King James Bible, ©1980 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read Psalm 42:1–11.

Listen to the psalm ~ First impressions

What is the *tone* of the psalm? What stands out to you from your initial reading?

When facing open hostility and opposition from people around you, where/what do you turn to in order to cope? Why?

Put a psalm in your heart ~ (Memory verse) **Psalm 42:8**

(Write out the verse in the spaces below. Practice it each time you open your lesson.)

The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me—a prayer to the God of my life.

Learn the lessons of the psalm ~

Selah (Think about):

We aren't told whether the psalmist was forced to join a group on an exile march with other Jews or possibly a worship leader who for some reason couldn't join the pilgrims going to Jerusalem to celebrate. It is apparent that, looking back and moving further away from Jerusalem, his heart was grieved thinking the felt the Lord had forgotten him.

I. Worship is a gift that feeds the soul ~ vv. 1–5

During a drought, the composer of the psalm saw a deer panting in its struggle to reach water and quench its thirst.

1. What did this graphic image remind him of? v. 1
 - a. What basic life essentials come to mind in this picture? vv. 2–3

The basics of life: water (v. 2) and food (v. 3), are necessary, but without *worship* (v.4), life to the psalmist was absolutely meaningless. Day and night his tears became his bread; his weeping was as “normal” as eating had been.

- b. Adding to his torment and the sense that God had abandoned him was the hostility of individuals causing him to doubt his belief. How does the psalmist refer to these men and with what question did they repeatedly taunt him? v. 3b, 9–10

- 2. This consistent mocking cause the psalmist such sorrow that he could not eat. His present circumstances were causing him to look back and remember what once was. What did he fondly remember? v. 4

Touchpoint ~

Hunger and thirst are often depicted in scripture as the longing for fellowship with God and the satisfaction and fulfillment it brings. Look up the following verses and jot down how they relate to your understanding of what is being conveyed in Psalm 42.

- Psalm 36:8

- Psalm 63:1

- Matthew 5:6

- John 4:10–14

The psalmist poured out his soul to God in prayer (v.4) but then immediately admonished himself. Through a time of self-examination he allowed God's spirit to minister to him.

3. As He continued to struggle with his perspective, with what words did he begin to "feed" his own soul? vv. 5, 11

These verses convey the "ups and downs" the believer goes through as we struggle with our circumstances and our perspective. Here we have the reminder that we cannot always control our circumstances, but we *can* and *must* control our perspective and the way we handle what comes our way. 2 Corinthians 10:4–5 (AMP) says, *For the weapons of our warfare are not physical (weapons of flesh and blood), but they are mighty before God for the overthrow and destruction of strongholds, [inasmuch as we] refute arguments and theories and reasonings and every proud and lofty thing that sets itself up against the (true) knowledge of God; and we lead every thought and purpose away captive into the obedience of Christ.* It is only maintaining a steadfast focus on God and feeding our minds on His Word that brings about the inner change we need to rise to the occasion.

Pause & ponder ~

The word *help* in the phrase "help of my countenance" (v.5) can also be translated "health." When you by faith look into the face of God and realize His countenance shining upon you, it results in spiritual health. Take a look at Numbers 6:22–26 and note your blessings. It is like absorbing a warm dose of vitamin D from the "Son-shine!" Who do you resemble afterward? (v.27)

Personal: Are *you* in a place today where you struggle to maintain the right perspective? Are your "enemies" taunting you to doubt that God is on the throne of your life and in control? Would you acknowledge that fact in the space below and then receive that warm dose of God's countenance shining down on you? Please record your results.

II. *Praise allows a change of heart & a chance to grow* ~ vv. 6–11

Though his soul was downcast, the psalmist recalls the times of worshiping the Lord while in Jerusalem writing, “I will remember You from the land of the Jordan, and from the heights of Hermon, from the Hill Mizar” (v. 6). He once occupied a place of ministry and usefulness by serving God in the temple, but now he can only remember those times from a distance.

Once again we can hear the disheartenment of his soul as he is overtaken by waves of distress: *deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me* (v.7 NIV). Tossed back and forth between words depicting his ordeal, he comes to a moment when he is able to recognize the Lord in it all.

1. With what overriding truth does he comfort his soul? v. 8

a. How does he refer to God as he continues his prayer? v. 9

The psalmist asks, “Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” He recognizes God as his “Rock”—a stable fortress in time of need—but that He was not immediately coming to help! He had reached the point of great distress, so much so that he was in “mourning” because of the oppression and it had begun to affect him physically.

b. With what does he liken the pain he is experiencing? v. 10

The phrase “breaking of my bones” literally means “murder in my bones!” His persecutors had brought about an agony in his soul that was also manifested physically in his body. The repeated blows of his enemies were breaking him down bit by bit.

In verse 11, he repeats the earlier stanza of verse 5, asking: *Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?* He answers these questions himself: *Put your hope in God!* The word *hope* means to put your trust in God and await His perfect timing to meet your need. It means: **Holding On** with **Patient Expectation!**

We can learn from the psalmist’s example: while waiting for God to come to our aid, in the meantime we should begin to praise Him—for who He is, what He’s done in the past, and what He has promised for our future good. What are some of the things you can think of to praise Him for today? That translates into *your growth for His glory!*

Pause & ponder ~

Hebrews 6:18–19 says that we flee to God for refuge to lay hold of the hope that is set before us. *This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us—even Jesus.* As you ponder the truth of these words, remember that your soul is not anchored downward to earth but upward to heaven—where the full realization of your hope yet awaits you! Please record your thoughts.

Live the psalm ~

How can you apply a portion of Psalm 42 to your life this week?

Pray the psalm ~

Your “self-talk”—your constant mental conversation throughout the day—has a lot to do with maintaining the right perspective. Worship will keep you centered on God. Select the verses of Psalm 42 that speak to your heart and pray them back to the Lord.

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 5: Psalm 32

The Joy of Forgiveness

Stay on the Path ~

Would you be willing to have your sins paraded in public for everyone to see? How about written down in the newspaper, broadcast on the evening news, or put up on the internet for the world to view and even post their comments? King David was willing to share openly about what he had personally learned from his own painful failures and for that believers down through the ages can give thanks to God!

Whether a sin is small or large in one's own eyes, in God's eyes it is tantamount to open rebellion against Him. It is a horrible moment when we realize we have rebelled against God and that is why we must never attempt to minimize or trivialize our sin, but to see it from God's perspective; to understand it is our sin that nailed Jesus Christ to the cross. It is the price for which He had to die. We owed a debt we could not pay; He paid the price He did not owe to save us and allow us to spend eternity with Him.

The story behind Psalm 32 reflects the time when King David sent his troops into battle while he remained at home. He committed an adulterous sin with a woman named Bathsheba, and then he attempted to cover up the sin by sending her husband to the front lines of the battle to be killed. David continued to live with his guilt for an entire year, becoming mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually ill as a result of keeping it hidden until he was confronted by a man sent from God. Only then did he confess, receive the forgiveness of God, and then compose it into a song to pass on to others.

Did you know ~

This is the first *Maschil* psalm recorded in the book of psalms. This type of psalm was meant to be used as an instructional tool for teaching. David composed it following his confrontation by Nathan the prophet when he was exposed for deception, adultery, and murder. His purpose in writing was to teach God's people the joyful blessings that are theirs as a result of confessing their sins to the Lord. Psalm 32 ultimately became a part of the closing worship service on the annual Day of Atonement when God's people collectively ask God to forgive their sins.

Psalm 32

A Psalm of David. A Contemplation.

1 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered.

2 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord
does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit.

3 When I kept silent, my bones grew old
Through my groaning all the day long.

4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;
My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah

5 I acknowledged my sin to You,
And my iniquity I have not hidden.

I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

6 For this cause everyone who is godly
Shall pray to You

In a time when You may be found;
Surely in a flood of great waters
They shall not come near him.

7 You are my hiding place;
You shall preserve me from trouble;
You shall surround me with
songs of deliverance. Selah

8 I will instruct you and teach you in
The way you should go;
I will guide you with My eye.

9 Do not be like the horse or the mule,
Which have no understanding,
Which must be harnessed with bit and bridle,
Else they will not come near you.

10 Many sorrows shall be to the wicked;
But he who trusts in the Lord,
Mercy shall surround him.

11 Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous;
And shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

Scripture from the New King James Bible, ©1980 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read Psalm 32:1–11.

Listen to the psalm ~ First impressions

What is the *tone* of the psalm? What stands out to you from your initial reading?

What joys could be yours if you were to openly confess your sins to God?

Put a psalm in your heart ~ (Memory verse) Psalm 32:5

(Write out the verse in the spaces below. Practice it each time you open your lesson.)

I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

Learn the lessons of the psalm ~

Selah (Think about):

The experience and expression of David's forgiveness actually came about a full year after he sinned and then covered it up. Once he entered into the freedom of his forgiveness, he had to share the joy of it with others.

I. God's people can celebrate the forgiveness of sin ~ vv. 1–2

Instead of beginning with a list of his sins, David starts this psalm with praises everyone in the assembly can hear. His acceptance with God was now all that mattered to him. He uses the word *blessed* (see Psalm 1:1 and the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5), which can best be translated "happy, exuberant, joyful." It is in the plural form, magnifying the intensity of the word.

1. According to David's jubilant expression to the congregation in verses 1–2, who is the "blessed" person?

Pause & ponder ~

There are four words used for *sin* in verses 1 and 2, each conveying a different aspect. What we have in these verses is a beautiful example of poetic parallelism; four words used side by side to cover the big picture of what sin actually means. Take a moment to consider each of the four words below and glance back at the scripture text in Psalm 32 to understand how David uses each one in context.

- *Transgressions* (v.1a): from the Hebrew word *pasha*, meaning defiance or rebellion against God. It involves a willful choice to depart from and defy Him. A transgression may be acted out against another person that is hurt by the sin, but it is actually a deliberate act against God's rightful authority.

- *Sin* (v. 1b): (Hebrew word *hataa*) means to “miss the mark, to go wrong, to miss the way, and to go astray.” It conveys the image of an archer with a bow and arrow shooting at a nearby target but missing it and falling short. In reality it refers to the man or woman that misses the mark of God’s Word, falling short of His glory and holiness. (See Romans 3:23).
- *Iniquity* (also *sin* v. 2a): is translated from the Hebrew word *awon*, meaning “crooked, twisted, bent, perverse, and corrupted.” Any and all sin causes a twisting or a bend of a person’s character, a compromising of integrity.
- *Deceit* (v. 2b): translated from the Hebrew word *remiya*, meaning “deception” as in self-deception. David lived with his own self-deception for an entire year, causing him to live a lie.

Touchpoint ~

Notice: the first word *transgression*, pertains to sin in our relationship with God. The second word *sin*, deals with our relationship to God’s Word—the application of it to our own lives. The third word *iniquity*, has to do with a person’s relationship to self. In other words, it is a *self-defilement, self-corrupting, twisting* of one’s own character.

Tragically, David’s sin involved all of the above types of sin, resulting in the fourth—*deceit*—that caused him to live with the lie in his own heart for a year in an attempt to cover up his sin. His attempts to justify and rationalize his actions resulted in him being weighed down, which also affected the lives of others around him.

Personal: Would you take a moment to consider if God is speaking to you about one or all of these sins and record your thoughts below? Think about what happens to your inner character and the potential impact on others. (Please feel free to keep this between you and God for now.)

The good news is that joyful blessing comes to the person whose sins are *forgiven*—(Hebrew *nasa*), literally meaning to “have one’s sins lifted off” (v. 1). What David covered up for a year—the adultery, murder, and hypocrisy—once confessed brought forgiveness. God lifted it off of David and put it out of His sight—He *covered* it (v. 1). It is a reference to the Day of Atonement when Israel’s high priest took the blood from an unblemished animal that had been sacrificed and carried that blood into the Most Holy Place, where he then sprinkled it onto the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant to symbolize atonement—forgiveness of sins.

- d. What was the message the Lord sent Nathan to disclose to David? How did David respond to it? vv. 7–13

- e. What was the collateral damage as the result of David’s sin? v. 14 (Think about how serious this can be.)

- f. How did this affect David personally? vv. 14–23

Was there a consequence? Yes, and in David’s case a huge one—the loss of his newborn son. God was faithful to confront David, offering him the opportunity to repent and confess his sin, which he did. Once he stopped deceiving himself, David acknowledged and accepted his responsibility, receiving God’s forgiveness and blessing.

- 4. In Psalm 32:5, David stated the truth of his sin in three different ways; what did he say? (Compare these statements in v. 5 with the earlier definitions of sin defined on pages 4 and 5 of your lesson.)
 - a.

 - b.

 - c.

Pause & ponder ~

Read the words of David’s exact confession following this sin in **Psalm 51:1–19** (which we will look at in depth in a future lesson). Record any thoughts that come to mind.

David did not make any further attempts to cover up what he had done. He confessed his sin to Nathan but, ultimately, his sin was against God! The word *confess* literally means “to agree with God.” In this context it is the Hebrew word *yada*, which means to declare openly or to speak out openly to God. Once his actions demonstrated true repentance, he declared: *And You forgave the iniquity of my sin*. The burden was finally lifted—for good!

III. David offers advice about confession of sins ~ vv. 6–11

Having experienced true forgiveness for himself, David goes on to instruct and encourage God's people to do the same: *For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You in a time when You may be found* (v. 6). He continues to pray using the imagery of a believer whose well-being is threatened by the potential floodwaters of God's chastening. If he confesses, such tragedy need not come near him (v. 7).

- 1 What did David consider God to be for him? What would David find there? v. 7

2. From the deepest despair there arose songs of praise in David's soul! As a result, he wanted to counsel others with what he had learned, instructing them in the path of forgiveness. vv. 7–11
 - a. What would he tell them? v. 8 (In vv. 8–9, David was repeating words God has used.)

 - b. What warning did he issue? What do *you* think he was referring to when he used this example? v. 9

 - c. Because David trusted in the Lord and experienced His faithfulness firsthand, what truth does he communicate to the hearers of this song? v. 10

The psalm ends the way it began—with the invitation to rejoice in the Lord and be glad! It is a call for every believer to sing the praises of God from the depth of their being—for He alone is worthy to be praised!

Pause & ponder ~

Personal: Is *your life* a living testimony to God's faithfulness? Has He lifted the weight of your sin? Would you like for Him to? Just turn to Him now in prayer . . .

Direct my steps by Your word and let no iniquity have dominion over me.
Psalm 119:133

Live the psalm ~

What have you learned this week about confession and forgiveness from your study of Psalm 32? How will you apply this learning to your life?

Pray the psalm ~

Select a verse(s) from Psalm 32 that spoke to your heart, write it out below, and pray it back to the Lord with joy and thanksgiving.

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 6: Psalms 100 & 111

The Joy of God's Faithfulness

Stay on the Path ~

At the end of WWII, in a tiny town just outside of Paris, an American soldier drove to a bakery at the break of dawn. The foggy mist made visibility difficult, but the scent of fresh baked pastries wafting through the air was like a compass guiding the soldier on his mission. Pulling his jeep to a stop just outside the bake shop, the soldier saw a lone child peering in the window at the hot doughnuts being removed from the oven. Clad in warm coat and hat, his small hands and nose pressed against the glass made the soldier smile as he walked up to the door. Inserting his hands into his uniform pockets to pull out whatever loose change he had on him, he entered the shop and a few moments later emerged with a small bag of warm melt-in-your-mouth doughnuts and handed them to the small boy, whose eyes lit up as big as his smile. Turning to the soldier who was also smiling, the boy asked in wonder, "*Mister, are you God?*"

Simple acts of kindness done with gladness should be common among all Christians—they are the hallmark of the inner workings of grace. Yet how often do we live out our faith with a sense of *ought* rather than overflowing gratitude? We pray because Christians *ought* to pray. We serve others because we *ought* to be meeting their needs. We witness to our neighbors out of a sense of *duty* rather than joy. We pay our tithe with a sense of *obligation* rather than thanksgiving. We say that we love the Lord, but then we act like we've been doused in lemon juice! People see our attitudes and are put off, when it is our likeness to Christ that should draw them.

The evidence of true worship is gladness! Anything not done in true gladness of heart is not motivated by love. The best gift we can give to others is borne out of a sense of gratitude for what the Lord has done for us. Psalms 100 and 111 reveal the key to growing and serving with gladness which will in turn inspire and encourage others to do the same.

Did you know ~

"There is no other book in which there is recorded so many deliverances, nor one in which the evidences and experiences of the fatherly providence and solicitude which God exercises toward us are celebrated with such splendor of diction. . . . There is no other book in which we are more perfectly taught the right manner of praising God" (John Calvin; from the preface to his commentary on the Psalms).

Psalm 100

A Song of Praise for the Lord's Faithfulness to His People.
A Psalm of Thanksgiving.

1 Make a joyful shout to the Lord, all you lands!

2 Serve the Lord with gladness;

Come before His presence with singing.

3 Know that the Lord, He is God;

It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;

We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

4 Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,

And into His courts with praise.

Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.

5 For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting,

And His truth endures to all generations.

Psalm 111

Praise to God for His Faithfulness and Justice

1 Praise the Lord!

I will praise the Lord with my whole heart,

In the assembly of the upright and

in the congregation.

2 The works of the Lord are great,

Studied by all who have pleasure in them.

3 His work is honorable and glorious,

And His righteousness endures forever.

4 He has made His wonderful works to be remembered;

The Lord is gracious and full of compassion.

5 He has given food to those who fear Him;

He will ever be mindful of His covenant.

6 He has declared to His people the power of His works,
In giving them the heritage of the nations.

7 The works of His hands are verity and justice;
All His precepts are sure.

8 They stand fast forever and ever,
And are done in truth and uprightness.

9 He has sent redemption to His people;
He has commanded His covenant forever:
Holy and awesome is His name.

10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;
A good understanding have all those
who do His commandments.
His praise endures forever.

Scripture from the New King James Bible, ©1980 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read Psalms 100 and 111.

Listen to the psalm ~ First impressions

What is the *tone* of these psalms? What stands out to you from your initial reading?

Compare and contrast a few of the similarities and differences you notice in these two psalms.

Put a psalm in your heart ~ (Memory verse) **Psalm 100:3**

(Write out the verse in the spaces below. Practice it each time you open your lesson.)

Know that the Lord, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

Learn the lessons of the psalm ~

Selah (Think about):

Psalm 100 is one of the shortest in the Psalter, consisting of eighty-five words spanning five verses. Short in number but large in scope, this psalm once learned and applied can clarify our purpose as believers and change our attitude about the way we carry out our service to the Lord. It is a clear reminder that we are called to serve from a heart of gladness and not from our own efforts.

I. Believers should be growing in gladness ~

It is a high privilege to be able to approach God's presence, and He summons us to come at will—our will—anytime, anywhere, in any circumstance. Such freedom should be considered with reverence and a sense of awe in adoring worship. He is the reigning King of Kings and we are His subjects; as such we should enter His courts with praise!

1. What kind of response does the Lord deserve from His people as we approach Him?
vv. 1–2

This psalm is a declaration of praise to God not only from His people, but all the nations of the earth. God called His people Israel to introduce the Gentile nations to the true and living God.

2. What does the psalmist want us to know about our relationship with God? v. 3
 - a. How do the verses in Psalm 139 (vv.13–18) add to your understanding?

3. For what kinds of things should God’s people be thankful? Are *you* appropriately grateful?

4. After everything in heaven and earth passes away, what remains that will endure forever? v. 5

The word *truth* (v. 5) comes from the Hebrew “amen”—a reference to God’s faithfulness and trustworthiness. In other words, if God’s Word dictates our behavior, we will reveal it in our worship of Him. Instead of imitating the world, we will imitate Christ and the world will witness the difference! *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire*” (Hebrews 12:28–29).

Touchpoint ~

Share your thoughts on how these two aspects of God’s character—*mercy* and *truth*—affect your life here on earth and prepare you for eternity with Him.

Pause & ponder ~

Take a moment to notice and then list the numerous imperative verbs inserted as commands in this short psalm. What do these verbs convey to you about the atmosphere surrounding God’s heavenly throne? How do they speak about your approach—your apprehension of who God is?

God's works (v. 4) literally mean His *wonders (pala)*, referring to what is out of the ordinary: the soul-startling effects of His works on those who observe them. It speaks of dramatic divine intervention—the saving acts of God on behalf of His people. They are too awesome to be forgotten!

Touchpoint ~

Think of a time when God acted so dramatically on your behalf that it left a permanent impression on you for all time. Weren't you awestruck by what He did on your behalf? Briefly share the details below.

God remembered His covenant with His people; He brought them out of their captivity; He fed them in the wilderness; He defeated their enemies and brought them into their promised land. His works stand fast forever and ever because they are done in truth and uprightness (v. 8). They are never to be reversed; they are established for all time.

3. What is the prerequisite condition for praising God? v. 10

The wisest thing a person can do is praise the Lord! The awe inspiring apprehension of who He is and what He's done is the beginning point—the first principle of wisdom. A wholesome reverence for Him prompts our praise and our obedience. There should be no end to either.

Pause & ponder ~

The psalmist says in verse 10: *A good understanding have all those who do His commandments.* Beholding the works of God through the eyes of faith translates into true worship, which leads to service, and service done in the right motive becomes an act of worship toward God. Not only do we sing with our lips, we serve with our lives; both are received in heaven as sacrifices to the Lord. *Therefore, by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased* (Hebrews 13:15–16). Share your thoughts.

Live the psalm ~

What have you learned this week about developing an attitude of gratitude? How will this cause you to grow and serve God with gladness of heart?

Pray the psalm ~

Select a verse(s) from Psalms 100 or 111 that spoke to your heart, write it out below, and pray it back to the Lord with joy and thanksgiving.

“God wants worshippers before workers; indeed, the only acceptable workers are those who have learned the art of worship.”

A.W. Tozer

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 7: Psalm 8

God's Glory—Our Potential

Stay on the Path ~

Seeing life—*your life*—from God's perspective is not only exciting and liberating, it is also the key to motivating you to live at full potential. Since God loves unreservedly, He also wants the very best for all of His children. So why is it that we, on the other hand, become short-sighted and settle for mediocrity when we should aim for excellence? Psalm 8 addresses two very pressing questions for believers: (1) Who is God? (2) What does He think about human beings? Understanding the answers can make all the difference in our drive to reach our full potential and in our desire to know Him even as we are known.

King David is perhaps best known for his heroic defeat of the giant Goliath, a story that might be considered a tall tale were it not for the fact that David became a living legend. 1 Samuel 17 depicts a graphic portrayal of one of the most exciting and often told stories of the Old Testament. In it, this Philistine giant of a man clad in a bronze helmet and body armor daily stood on one side of the Valley of Elah taunting the Israelites encamped on the other side. There he would be, hour after hour, shouting blasphemies and challenging the Israelites across the valley floor to step forward and engage him in combat. David arrived fresh from the sheepfold, astonished that there was not a single soldier in all of Israel brave enough to take on this outrageous enemy and silence him. Understandably, in everyone's eyes the giant was far too big to take on; in David's eyes, he was too big a target to miss! So take down Goliath David did, with just a small sling and a single stone; and thus, a legend was born. From that day on, David was assigned to the court of King Saul. He became chief court musician, composing and playing his songs on the harp to soothe the mad king during his often repeated dark moods.

It is believed by scholars to be around this time that David composed Psalm 8 (later adding a footnote when the music was arranged for temple worship). The footnote contained in the Hebrew text used the word *Muthlabben*: "*To the Chief Musician upon Muthlabben.*" It is an expression that means, "the death of the champion." The Hebrew word for *champion* in 1 Samuel 17:4 is translated: *the man of the space between the camps*. It is a direct reference to the story of David and Goliath. This dramatic story's impact leaves the reader to imagine the power of this psalm on the human soul as its melody and words were repeatedly sung.

Did you know ~

Some passages in the Book of Psalms are prophetic, anticipating the coming of the Messiah. Some were fulfilled in the life of Christ's life as seen throughout the New Testament. Still others point to His impending return. Psalm 8 is noted by scholars as one of the principle Messianic psalms in the collection (Hebrews 2).

Psalm 8

To the Chief Musician. On the instrument of Gath.
A Psalm of David.

1 O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth,
Who have set Your glory above the heavens!

2 Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants
You have ordained strength,
Because of Your enemies,
That You may silence the enemy and the avenger.

3 When I consider Your heavens,
the work of Your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which You have ordained,

4 What is man that You are mindful of him,
And the son of man that You visit him?

5 For You have made him a little lower than the angels,
And You have crowned him with glory and honor.

6 You have made him to have dominion
over the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet,

7 All sheep and oxen—even the beasts of the field,

8 The birds of the air, and the fish of the sea
That pass through the paths of the seas.

9 O Lord, our Lord,
How excellent is Your name in all the earth!

Scripture from the New King James Bible, ©1980 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read Psalm 8.

Learn the lessons of the psalm ~

Selah (Think about):

Psalm 8 expresses our faith as seen in the wonders of creation. The beginning and concluding verses of this psalm celebrate the excellence of God visible in the splendor of our vast universe. Encased in the middle we see the wonder of human beings—the focus and purpose of God’s handiwork.

David begins the first three verses of this beautiful psalm with adoration to the Lord, expressing his praise a thousand years before Jesus was born upon the earth. With our Biblical understanding of Jesus, how much more fully can we worship God’s excellence as we see His character revealed in the face of Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:15).

I. All glory and honor belong to God ~

The excellence of God far surpasses even that which His creation can reveal. David begins the psalm with a declaration of God’s greatness: “*Oh Lord, our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth!*” The word *excellent—majestic*—refers to the splendor of God’s character as it is revealed in His created world.

1. Does God’s visible creation in the world around you move you to praise Him? Name some examples where you see God’s majesty in nature, stirring you to praise.

2. Because the Creator is forever greater than His creation, His glory far exceeds the visible limitations of earth and heaven. What does David say about God’s glory? v. 1

Pause & ponder ~

The twin words *Lord*. . . *Lord* (v. 1) are God’s proper name of *Yahweh* (YHWH), encompassing all of His attributes into one “glorious and awesome name” (Deuteronomy 28:58): THE LORD YOUR GOD. The Hebrew word *Yehovah* is the most frequently used name for God in Scripture (used 5,321 times in the Hebrew Bible). It is a name considered so holy that it was never allowed to be pronounced aloud. It refers to God as the eternal, immutable, self-existent One. The word *Adonai* was inserted in its place in Scripture readings as a reverent way of openly addressing God out loud. The word *adonai* means “master” or “lord.” This is the name God used to instruct Moses from the burning bush when He said: “I AM WHO I AM.” Imagine holding God’s name in such reverence you could not even utter it from your lips! How does this kind of reverential awe influence you in your worship of God? Do you give Him the glory He is due?

II. *A right understanding of God's true nature leads to a right understanding of the dignity of man.*

In verse 2, David reflects on the fact that God uses the smallest and weakest of human beings to silence His enemies—babes and nursing infants. Think about it: children and tiny infants have no knowledge or understanding about who God is or how to praise Him. The most they can say or demonstrate in their own way is: “I love you.” But the innocent act of praise from the weakest of human beings heard in heaven overpowers the loud voices of the Lord’s enemies on earth!

David goes on to consider that even a full-grown adult seems terribly insignificant in comparison to the majesty of God’s heavenly creation: *When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him* (vv. 3–4)?

Touchpoint ~

One aspect of God’s greatness is evident in the fact that He cares for His creation. How does it make you feel to know that God cares more for the souls of people than He does for the stars and planets of the universe?

And because God cares about *you*, He visits you (v. 4). Share one of the ways God has recently manifested His loving care toward you.

-
-
1. David marveled at the dignity God assigned to man; what declaration does he make about our significance? v. 5
 2. God gave mankind dominion over His earthly creation. List those specific areas that He assigned to our care. vv. 6–8

Putting your understanding of God into a right perspective also leads to a proper realization of your dignity in His eyes. You are below God but above everything else He created. He made you a little lower than the angels, yet crowned you with glory and honor. Such knowledge is too glorious! *O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!*

3. Personal: Do you think possessing the proper understanding of your Creator’s estimation of you will help you when you are prone to *wander*. . . to instead be someone who is prone to *wonder*? Please share your thoughts below.

Live the psalm ~

You have learned from Psalm 8 that the Lord *your* God not only created you, He crowns you, companions with you, and also commissions you to do His will. What have you discovered about God's purpose for your life?

Pray the psalm ~

Are you using His glory to reach your full potential? If not, get serious today; make it your aim to please Him. Select one of the verses from Psalm 8 to pray back to God, asking Him to enable you to live by and for His glory.

“When read only occasionally, these prayers are too overwhelming in design and power and tend to turn us back to more palatable fare. But whoever has begun to pray the Psalter seriously and regularly will soon give a vacation to other little devotional prayers and say: ‘Ah, there is not the juice, the strength, the passion, the fire which I find in the Psalter . . .’”

Martin Luther

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 8: Psalm 27

Steps to Communion with God

Stay on the Path ~

The famed preacher John Wesley is remembered as a devout believer, a trailblazer, a man full of faith, or so he thought until one fateful day his faith was tested. Having just completed a missionary assignment in the United States, Wesley boarded a ship bound for England and before too long the vessel encountered a violent storm. Fear gripped everyone on board—including John Wesley—with the exception of a group of traveling Moravian missionaries.

After the storm had passed, Wesley inquired of one of the missionaries, “Were you not afraid of the storm?” The Moravian replied, “Afraid? Why should I be afraid? I know Jesus Christ!” He then turned to Wesley and with an abrupt frankness asked him, “Do you know Christ?” Wesley was a trained theologian, educated at Oxford and ordained as a minister but, in that one moment to his own surprise, he realized that he had limited experiential knowledge of the Lord. The terrifying storm that threatened his life was the first time John Wesley questioned his own faith. The encounter with the man he had just met but who had visibly demonstrated his faith in God, prepared the way for Wesley to later have his own personal encounter with God that would give him the faith to endure to the end.

Problems can do that—put us face to face with others who seem to have a vibrant faith that causes us to question our own. It is at that point we may turn to look inwardly and wonder what’s wrong with us. Some believers live out their Christian lives with the idea that if they muster up enough faith, God will intervene and act on their behalf. But here in Psalm 27, David’s life experience reveals that genuine faith is actually the believer’s response to the omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent God who comes near to us in our problems. The closer we get to Him, the greater our faith becomes to deal head on with life’s problems.

Did you know ~

Charles Haddon Spurgeon through his own suffering found in the psalms the words to give his life meaning as well as the power and strength to keep going when all seemed hopeless. He drew heavily from the psalms for both his prayers and his writings. He once said that the *beauty of the Lord is the one thing which, if a Christian had, he needs desire no more. It is enough even to satisfy us, the fruition of God, and the beholding of him . . . to have correspondence and fellowship and communion with him there.*

Psalm 27

An exuberant Declaration of Faith.
A Psalm of David.

1 The Lord is my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the strength of my life;
Of whom shall I be afraid?

2 When the wicked came against me
To eat up my flesh
My enemies and foes,
They stumbled and fell.

3 Though an army may encamp against me
My heart shall not fear;
Though war may rise against me,
In this I will be confident.

4 One thing I have desired of the Lord,
That will I seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the Lord
All the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the Lord
And to inquire in His temple.

5 For in the time of trouble
He shall hide me in His pavilion;
In the secret place of His tabernacle
He shall hide me;
He shall set me high upon a rock.

6 And now my head shall be lifted up
Above my enemies all around me;
Therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy
In His tabernacle;
I will sing, yes, I will
sing praises to the Lord.

7 Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice!
Have mercy also upon me, and answer me.

8 When You said, "Seek My face,"
My heart said to You, "Your face,
Lord, I will seek."

9 Do not hide Your face from me;
Do not turn Your servant away in anger;
You have been my help;
Do not leave me nor forsake me,
O God of my salvation.

10 When my father and my mother forsake me,
Then the Lord will take care of me.

11 Teach me Your way, O Lord,
And lead me in a smooth path,
Because of my enemies.

12 Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries;
For false witnesses have risen against me,
And such as breathe out violence.

13 I would have lost heart, unless I had believed
That I would see the goodness of the Lord
In the land of the living.

14 Wait on the Lord;
Be of good courage,
And He shall strengthen your heart;
Wait, I say, on the lord!

Scripture from the New King James Bible, ©1980 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read Psalm 27.

Listen to the psalm ~ First impressions

What is the *tone* of Psalm 27? What stands out to you from your initial reading?

Are you seeking God with your fellow believers by attending church on a regular basis? How does this strengthen your heart in difficult times?

- a. How did God show His faithfulness to David? v. 2

- b. What was David's heart response toward God? v. 3

What David needed most in the midst of his problems only God could give: God gave light because He is light. He desires to show His children *what* to do (knowledge) coupled with *how* to do it (wisdom). In addition, He gives us the will to be obedient to Him. The word *salvation* in verse 1, simply means deliverance—a way out of the unsolvable.

- 2. If we read Psalm 27 in the light of the Gospel message, we remember the words of Jesus. Look up the references below and note your findings.
 - a. John 8:12

 - b. John 14:6

 - c. John 16:33

- 3. What God did for David in times past had taught him to trust in Him. Building on this confidence when facing further difficulties led to one dominant desire—what was it? v. 4

Pause & ponder ~

Problems can either drive people away from God or bring them closer to Him. David allowed the loneliness and magnitude of his problems to drive him to God. What this lesson teaches us is that in our problems our contemplation of God should lead us to want to be with Him. When we are, how does His presence benefit us? What should our heart's response be? vv. 5–6

II. God's answer to our dilemma is Himself.

When we allow our problems to lead us to God, then we are ready to hear what He has to say. Usually it is at times like this that we have nothing to give Him but our prayer: *Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice! Have mercy also upon me, and answer me.*

- I. What did God say to the psalmist? v. 8
 - a. What did David say in reply?

The word *face* in Hebrew means both *face* and *presence*. The Old Testament usage of the word was represented in situations such as the Lord promising Moses: “My presence will go with you and I will give you rest” (Exodus 33:14–15). Moses was so desperate to have God accompany him that he replied, “If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here. For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us?”

God is constantly sounding the invitation to come and seek His face. When problems arise, listen! In your heart and soul you will hear the call, “Seek My face.” And your first response should be, “Your face, Lord I will seek.” We should not merely talk to God but listen for His still small voice. Our desire to pray and spend time with Him is motivated by His prior desire to commune with us.

Touchpoint ~

The admonition to seek God's face is repeated in the New Testament by Jesus Himself. Read the story in Luke 10:38–42. Think carefully about answering the following . . .

- a. What was Martha's priority and what was her heart attitude? v. 40
- b. How did Mary's priority to sit at the feet of Jesus benefit her? v. 39

Martha wasn't doing anything wrong; in fact she was doing a good thing by preparing a meal to serve the Lord and His followers. But Martha's busyness led her to take her focus off the Lord and to feel sorry for herself that she had to do so much. There are times when even a good thing can become a bad thing if it keeps us from the best thing—and the best thing is spending time with Jesus!

- c. What did Jesus say to Martha about the blessing that comes from seeking Him first?
vv. 41–42

Live the psalm ~

Thinking that you will one day arrive at a plateau in life where all your problems will disappear is a mistake. There is always a new dilemma just around the corner waiting for you. The secret is to face the problems that come your way by taking them to God—seeking His face! The answers He reveals to your soul will not be taken away. Briefly note the difficulty you are facing today and the effect it is having on your life.

Pray the psalm ~

Now take that problem to the throne of God where you will find His grace is not only sufficient, but it will more than meet your need. Claim His truth in 2 Corinthians 12:9 as yours today. Write it out in the space below as you let Him give you a greater revelation of who He is!

Unless men see a beauty and delight in the worship of God, they will not do it willingly.

John Owen

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 9: Psalm 139

God's Intimate Knowledge of Me

Stay on the Path ~

George Beverly Shea has been a musical artist extraordinaire and ministry partner alongside Billy Graham since 1943, when the two first met doing a radio program in Chicago. Mr. Graham once said, "I've been listening to Bev Shea sing for more than 50 years, and I would still rather hear him sing than anyone else I know." In his biography profile Shea is referred to as "a man of deep sympathies, who will listen endlessly to the troubles of others but dismiss his own with a word and a smile." The words to one of his most often sung numbers remind us to view life from a heavenly perspective, and to adore both the infinity and intimacy of the God we see here depicted in Psalm 139:

*How big is God? How big and wide His vast domain.
To try to tell, these lips can only start.
He's big enough to rule His mighty universe;
Yet small enough to live within my heart."*

On planet earth where over six billion persons reside, God knows each one individually and intimately. Everything about us—every thought, attitude, action, or word spoken—is known by Him. Nothing is hidden from Him. He is everywhere at once, involved in the tiniest details of our lives. Such knowledge, when meditated upon, reduces us to the lowest humility and rouses us to the highest adoration. His glory and majesty far exceed our ability to comprehend Him and yet, the Bible says, it is possible to know Him even as we are known!

Did you know ~

Psalm 139 is one of the wisdom psalms, written by David from a deeply personal perspective. The occasion for its composition is unknown, but its message is unmistakably clear. In it we find reason for the awesome wonder with which David worshipped the God who created the universe, yet who intimately knew him and became involved in the daily details of David's life. This poem beautifully describes the omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, and divine holiness of God, aspects of His character that forever impact the lives of all His children.

Psalm 139

For the Chief Musician.

A Psalm of David.

- 1 O Lord, You have searched me
and known me.
- 2 You know my sitting down and my rising up;
You understand my thought afar off.
- 3 You comprehend my path and my lying down,
And are acquainted with all my ways.
- 4 For there is not a word on my tongue,
But behold, O Lord,
You know it altogether.
- 5 You have hedged me behind and before,
And laid Your hand upon me.
- 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
It is high, I cannot attain it.
- 7 Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Your presence?
- 8 If I ascend into heaven, You are there;
If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.
- 9 If I take the wings of the morning,
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
- 10 Even there Your hand shall lead me,
And Your right hand shall hold me.
- 11 If I say, "surely the darkness shall fall on me,"
Even the night shall be light about me;
- 12 Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You,
But the night shines as the day;
The darkness and the light are both
alike to You.
- 13 For You formed my inward parts;
You covered me in my mother's womb.
- 14 I will praise You, for I am fearfully
And wonderfully made;
Marvelous are Your works,
And that my soul knows very well.

15 My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the lowest
parts of the earth.

16 Your eyes saw my substance,
Being yet unformed.
And in Your book they all were written,
The days fashioned for me,
When as yet there were none of them.

17 How precious also are Your thoughts
To me, O God!
How great is the sum of them!

18 If I should count them, they would be
More in number than the sand;
When I am awake, I am still with You.

19 Oh, that You would slay the wicked, O God!
Depart from me, therefore, you
Blood thirsty men.

20 For they speak against You wickedly;
Your enemies take Your name in vain.

21 Do I not hate them, O Lord, who hate You?
And do I not loathe those who rise up
Against You?

22 I hate them with perfect hatred;
I count them my enemies.

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me, and know my anxieties;

24 And see if there is any wicked way in me.
And lead me in the way everlasting.

(Scripture from the New King James Bible, ©1980 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.)

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read Psalm 139.

Learn the lessons of the psalm ~

Selah (Think about):

David spent a lifetime contemplating the nature and attributes of God, so it is no wonder that he penned the words to this exquisite poem. The Lord is referred to by name six times and by personal pronoun thirty times (David refers to himself fifty times), giving the reader firsthand insight into a soul engaged with God. We have a glimpse of a very intimate relationship the way God intended for it to be. If you haven't already asked, bow your head and heart before Him, letting Him know you want your eyes opened to the take-away truth God wants *you* to receive from your quiet time with Him this week.

I. God is Omniscient (All-Knowing) vv. 1–6

It is mind-boggling to realize that God knows absolutely everything about us and still loves us! David had difficulty grasping the fact that God knows us even better than we know ourselves. Write out the thought expressed in verses 1–6 by putting these verses in your own words.

v. 1 _____

v. 2 _____

v. 3 _____

v. 4 _____

v. 5 _____

v. 6 _____

The word “searched” in verse 1 means “to spy out, explore, to dig deeply into,” as in to explore a country. The word *yadah* (know) is used in the phrase “You know me” meaning, “You know me intimately by experience.” It refers to a thorough knowledge of the depth of one’s character and heart.

Pause & ponder ~

How does one dig deeply enough inside to find the words to express what cannot be fully comprehended? As David meditated on the thorough knowledge God had of him, the conclusion he came to is that God is always near—there was no way for him to avoid God’s scrutiny. It is up close and personal—revealed from the inside out! Compare David’s response in verse 6 with that of your own response. For David, it was as humbling as humanely possible; what is it for *you*? Please explain.

II. God is Omnipresent (All-Present) ~ vv. 7–12

Not only is God all-knowing, He is also all-present—everywhere at one time—in the form of the Holy Spirit. David uses two rhetorical questions to convey that God is always with us: *where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence* (v. 7)? The earlier thought of fleeing God now turns into the anticipation of finding Him.

Touchpoint ~

No matter where: heaven, hell, the horizon of the morning, the depth of the sea, day or night—God is already there! The words “You are there” (v. 8) in the Hebrew literally say, *There—Thou!* The words should not cause us to fear but to be free from fear of the future. How will this reality affect your perspective of what lies ahead? Read these verses over carefully once again and then share your thoughts below.

III. *God is Omnipotent (All-Powerful) ~ vv. 13–18*

With awesome wonder David declares that God knew him and worked out his destiny before he was born.

Pause & ponder ~

Using verses 13–18, finish the following thoughts in your own words . . .

a. *You formed me—* _____

b. *You saw my substance—* _____

c. *You fashioned my days—* _____

d. What soulful conclusion does David draw about himself and about God? v. 14

e. What else do you learn about the days God fashioned for you? See Ephesians 2:10.

The key to pursuing God in the Psalms is not how fast you're keeping the pace, but whether or not you are obedient to *stay on the path!* The Lord created you for His pleasure and fashioned your days to proclaim His praise! His ultimate will is that you would experience His love and enjoy the abundant life that is filled with His presence and power—to maximize each day, relationship and opportunity that come your way.

IV. God is Holy ~ vv. 19–24

If David tried to list every truth and attribute of God, he would exhaust all effort long before coming to the place of apprehending what cannot be comprehended. If he tried to count God's thoughts about him, they would outnumber the grains of sand on all the beaches of the world. The thought of it was too much for David.

It is at this point that David affirms his trust in God and faithfulness to Him. Speaking against God's enemies as his own, those that opposed God also opposed David. What does David say about them in each of the following verses?

- a. vv. 19–20:

- b. vv. 21–22:

- c. In dealing with sin, David was as hard on himself as he was in speaking of God's enemies. What does he pray to God in verses 23–24?

Touchpoint ~

Do you think you know the limitations of your own heart? Think again . . . Look at what Jeremiah 17:9 has to say, and then record your findings below.

Live the psalm ~

Search me; know me; try me; lead me—this was David’s prayer; it was also the compass that navigated his life. It is only when your own sin is confessed and removed that God can forgive and lead you in the way everlasting—the way of holiness. Has God pointed to anything through your study this week that you realize is separating you from Him? If so, make note of it below.

Pray the psalm ~

The Lord will prepare you for what He has prepared! Often that preparation takes place through the prayer process. David’s honest confession in the closing verses of Psalm 139 is an example that can help us grapple with reality and be honest with ourselves. Many times we don’t recognize God is with us and that we are standing on holy ground! Don’t miss what God has for you . . . take time to be holy before Him. Compose your prayer to Him and then lift it before Him.

*Earth’s crammed with Heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes.*

(Elizabeth Barrett Browning)

“How shall finite comprehend infinite? We shall apprehend Him, but not comprehend Him.”

Richard Sibbes

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 10: Psalm 77

How to Overcome Anxiety and Depression

Stay on the Path ~

During dark circumstances it is very hard to hold onto the hope of a brighter day. Whenever the path of life leads into the lowest valley, the soul's closest companions are often that of sorrow and suffering, and at times even depression and despair. No one's course is permanently detoured away from the valley, sooner or later all roads lead there. David reminds us in Psalm 23 that the path to the valley does not end there; rather it goes through to the other side. While in the valley, God protects and guides with His own presence, bringing delight and peace to the soul in distress.

Here is Psalm 77, Asaph writes of a time of great personal suffering during which, much like David, he finds comfort and encouragement. Asaph reflects on a much earlier act of God on behalf of His people—the exodus from Egypt—one of Israel's finest hours. In pondering this monumental victory over the tyranny of Pharaoh's slavery, Asaph receives renewed faith and rejoicing to face his own distress.

For Asaph, glancing back at God's mighty deliverance of His people awakened in him the assurance that the Lord wants to be part of our everyday lives. The common people we read about in scripture are a mirror of the ups and downs we experience and how God uses our circumstances to show us He is indeed there. Moments of reflection on our journey can become *stones of remembrance* that we too pick up and look at whenever we need a lift or a reason to keep going.

Did you know ~

Psalm 77 fits into the category of *lament psalms*, which comprise the biggest portion of the Book of Psalms. These are *occasional poems*, composed out of a specific circumstance or situation, covering a variety of topics. The elements of a lament psalm can appear in any order and are sometimes repeated more than once in the poem. These elements most often consist of: a cry to God, a specific lament or explanation of the crisis, a prayer to God, a statement of faith, and a declaration of praise.

Psalm 77

The Consoling Memory of God's Redemptive Works

To the Chief Musician. To Jeduthun.
A Psalm of Asaph.

1 I cried out to God with my voice—
 To God with my voice;
 And He gave ear to me.
2 In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord;
 My hand was stretched out in the night
 without ceasing;
 My soul refused to be comforted.
3 I remembered God, and was troubled;
I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed.
 Selah

4 You hold my eyelids open;
 I am so troubled that I cannot speak.
5 I have considered the days of old,
 The years of ancient times.
6 I call to remembrance my song in the night;
 I meditate within my heart,
 And my spirit makes diligent search.

7 Will the Lord cast off forever?
 And will He be favorable no more?
8 Has His mercy ceased forever?
 Has His promise failed forevermore?
9 Has God forgotten to be gracious?
Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?
 Selah

10 And I said, "This is my anguish;
 But I will remember the years of the
 right hand of the Most High."
11 I will remember the works of the Lord;
Surely I will remember Your wonders of old.
12 I will also meditate on all Your work,
 And talk of Your deeds.
13 Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary;
 Who is so great a God as our God?
14 You are the God who does wonders;
 You have declared Your strength
 among the peoples.
15 You have with Your arm redeemed
 Your people,
 The sons of Jacob and Joseph.
 Selah

16 The waters saw You, O God;
The waters saw You, they were afraid;
The depths also trembled.
17 The clouds poured out water;
The skies sent out a sound;
Your arrows also flashed about.
18 The voice of Your thunder was
in the whirlwind;
The lightnings lit up the world;
The earth trembled and shook.
19 Your way was in the sea,
Your path in the great waters,
And Your footsteps were not known.
20 You led Your people like a flock
By the hand of Moses and Aaron.

(Scripture from the New King James Bible, ©1980 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.)

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read Psalm 77.

Listen to the psalm ~ First impressions

What is the *tone* of Psalm 77? What stands out to you from your initial reading?

The mental record you have of God's previous work on your behalf is a storehouse of faith-building moments that you can access and bring to the forefront in the present or future, whenever you need to remind yourself that He cares. Briefly record one such moment when God intervened to help you. How did knowing He was there make a difference for you?

2. Now look at verses 1-6 for the words or phrases that describe Asaph's pursuit of God in the midst of his distress.

Restless, sleepless, speechless, as Asaph continued to become more desperate in seeking God, his soul refused to be comforted. He sought the Lord but could only groan within himself, finding no relief from his suffering.

Overwhelmed and discouraged instead of uplifted and encouraged, in verses 7–9, Asaph fires off a series of questions that he already knew the answers to: *Will the Lord reject forever? Will He never again show His favor? Has He forgotten to show mercy? Has His promise failed forever? Has he forgotten to be gracious? In anger has He withheld His compassion?* Of course the answers to all of the above is a resounding “No!” but the psalmist had allowed himself to think of God in these negative tones and it led him to begin to believe his own doubts. The perspective is reflective of Asaph's depressed state, but these unsettling questions would soon prompt the remembrance of God's faithfulness in earlier times.

Pause & ponder ~

Disappointment, discouragement, and depression can, if allowed to persist over time, radically affect not only your perspective of God but prompt doubts about your faith in Him. That is why it is vitally important for you to carve out consistent disciplined daily time with the Lord. If you say you've never doubted Him, then you're probably not being honest with yourself. Watch how Satan will use your difficult seasons to cause you to doubt God's love and compassion. During these low times the Holy Spirit is faithful to put a check in your heart and point out that you are headed down the wrong road. When He does, you need to stop . . . *refocus your attention, redirect your thoughts, and renew your confidence* in what God has done for you!

Personal: Are you currently going through a trial that has undermined your confidence in who God is or has caused you to doubt His love for you? Briefly share a few details below.

When in doubt—search Him out! Go to the Word of God to find out the truth about God. Don't yield to despair; search the scriptures for comfort. Take time to pause and ponder the passage found in Romans 8:31–39. Answer the following:

- What do these verses say about your relationship with God? Can anything separate you from His love?

- What does this make you? v. 37 How should this truth affect your perspective today?

II. *Decide today to take control of your thought life and self-talk.*

Jesus Christ did not come to give us overcoming life—but life to overcome! The key to overcome your anxiety and depression is within your reach.

In verses 10–15, Asaph comes to the turning point of the psalm, acknowledging his situation and at the same time offering his hope in God's acts on behalf of His people in the past.

1. What does Asaph determine to remember? v. 11
2. What does he meditate upon and purpose to talk about? v. 12

Asaph speaks of God's ways as holy—in *the sanctuary* (v.13). Again he asks a rhetorical question but this time it is positive: *Who is so great a God as our God?* It is an honest acknowledgment that God's will and His ways are without error, perfect and holy. His power is unlimited; with His own arm He had *redeemed—delivered or rescued*—His people (vv. 14–15).

Touchpoint~

In order to practice the Lord's presence you must learn to let go of negative unpleasant thoughts that cause you to doubt and even turn away from Him. Replace them with the truths found in His Word. The Bible is very clear about how we can control our *thought life* and *self-talk*. We may not be able to control our circumstances but we can control how we handle our circumstances! Try looking up the references below to see what difference they can have on your perspective and your choices when navigating through a difficult situation. Note your findings.

2 Corinthians 10:3–5

- a. What do these verses say about the believer's warfare and our weapons?
- b. Because we fight a spiritual battle, we fight against everything that exalts itself against the knowledge of God by bringing every thought into captivity—*taking it captive*—to make that thought obey Christ. That responsibility is *yours!* Remember that the next time you begin to doubt, as doubts tend to become strongholds over time.

Philippians 4:8

- a. Immediately let go of negative thoughts when you recognize you're entertaining them. Replace them with the kinds of thoughts found in this verse—list all eight of them below.
- b. Notice the command at the end to *meditate on these things!* Keep meditating on them and make them a part of your mental (self-talk) and verbal conversation so they become your automatic default when needed.

- c. Okay, now let's get personal for a moment . . . what negative thought(s) have you allowed to take hold of your mind and heart? List them in the space provided.

- d. What part do these thoughts play in the spiritual battle you are waging at this moment? (Think about how they may be undermining your faith and trust in the Lord.)

- e. Will you take these thoughts captive right now by bringing them to the cross of Christ, acknowledging them and letting them go? Do it now.

- f. Which thought(s) from Philippians 4:8 will you use to replace the negative ones and erase your doubts?

Pause & ponder ~

Asaph singles out one act from Israel's past history to reflect on and speak about God's greatness—that of the Exodus from Egypt. Pause and ponder the account in Exodus 13:17–22; and 14:1–31.

Using poetic form in Psalm 77, Asaph describes the parting of the Red Sea, the first miracle following the Israelite's departure from bondage. Note the response of nature to God's command in each of the following verses:

- a. The waters (v. 16):

- b. The clouds (v. 17):

- c. The skies (v. 17):

(Note: Lightning is depicted as *arrows* in vv. 17–18)

- d. The earth (v. 18):

Try to picture in your mind the sheer terror of the moment, as God unleashed His mighty power. Though there appeared to be no way, His path led directly through the Red Sea, which parted for His people to cross. God's *footsteps* or *footprints* were not visible but the tremendous power of His hand was evident to everyone as they all crossed safely on dry ground with their enemy in hot pursuit!

Live the psalm ~

You may be going through a “Red Sea” experience of your own right now—the enemy is fiercely pursuing you while up ahead you see no possible way out! Don’t look at the magnitude of the waves overwhelming you or the depth of the pain . . . instead **look to God**. He alone knows the way you take and when He has tried you, you will come forth as gold.

Document where you are at this time; what you remember about God’s faithfulness to you; and make note of any changes you see in the coming weeks.

Pray the psalm ~

“Tears have a tongue, and grammar, and language that our heavenly Father knows.” (Samuel Rutherford) You may think that no one knows or understands the depth of your pain, but God knows and cares. Trust Him with your fears; write down what concerns you the most and lift it to Him in prayer.

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 11: Psalm 90

Teach Us to Number Our Days

Stay on the Path ~

The inscription above Psalm 90 indicates that it was written by Moses. It is the only psalm with this distinction, likely making it the oldest recorded psalm in Scripture. Composed more than fourteen hundred years before the coming of Christ, scholars believe it was written at some point during Israel's wilderness wanderings. What should have been a few weeks or months of travel from Egypt to the Promised Land turned into forty years of desert circles, until nearly all the generation that God had delivered died out in the wilderness.

Moses led a stiff-necked nation of God's people that, instead of obeying, insisted on rebelling against God time after time. In the midst of continuing disappointment and despair, Moses composed Psalm 90 as his prayer to God, keeping his focus on the eternal. The psalm itself transcends time, serving to remind Moses and everyone who followed, that what truly matters in life is not what is temporal but eternal, not what is visible to the eye but what is essential to the soul.

In today's world we are so tethered to our technology that we let time control us rather than the other way around. How on earth did Moses ever find his way through the wilderness without his GPS when leaving what was familiar to go out into the unknown? Would we, like the Israelites, be willing to leave all modern conveniences behind and learn to trust God for what we need? Could we disconnect ourselves from our I-Phones, computers, and time-pieces for a season in order to sense God's presence and listen for His voice? The Israelites didn't pass their test of obedience, though they were given multiple opportunities over forty years. If you would just imagine yourself in their sandals for a moment . . . as God looks down at your life, how would He say that *you* are doing?

Did you know ~

When mortality begins staring you in the face, the psalms offer a many-faceted picture of who God is and what He's done on your behalf. In these poems our ordinary earthly life takes on a heavenly perspective, as issues are played out with God at the center of it all. We learn that our raw human emotions are not only an essential part of this life, but that they matter to God as well. *Here is poetry which more than vies with that of Milton and Shakespeare, yet it is the poetry of downright reality; and, as "the body is more than raiment," so here, the reality is greater than the poetry which expresses it.* (J. Sidlow Baxter)

Psalm 90

The Eternity of God,
and Man's Frailty

A Prayer of Moses
the man of God

1 Lord, You have been our dwelling
place in all generations.

2 Before the mountains were
brought forth,
Or ever You had formed the earth
and the world,
Even from everlasting to everlasting
You are God.

3 You turn man to destruction,
And say, "Return, O children of men."

4 For a thousand years in Your sight
Are like yesterday when it is past,
And like a watch in the night.

5 You carry them away like a flood;
They are like a sleep.

In the morning they are like grass
which grows up:

6 In the morning it flourishes and grow up;
In the evening it is cut down and withers.

7 For we have been consumed by Your anger,
And by Your wrath we are terrified.

8 You have set our iniquities before You,
Our secret sins in the light of
Your countenance.

9 For all our days have passed away in
Your wrath;

We finish our years like a sigh.

10 The days of our lives are seventy years;
And if by reason of strength they are
eighty years,

Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow;
For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

11 Who knows the power of Your anger?
For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath.

12 So teach us to number our days,
That we may gain a heart of wisdom.

13 Return, O Lord!
How long?

And have compassion on
Your servants.

14 Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy,
That we may rejoice and be glad
all our days!
15 Make us glad according to the days
In which You have afflicted us,
The years in which we have seen evil.
16 Let Your work appear to Your servants,
And Your glory to their children.
17 And let the beauty of the Lord our
God be upon us,
And establish the work of our hands for us;
Yes, establish the work of our hands.

(Scripture from the New King James Bible, ©1980 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.)

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read Psalm 90.

Listen to the psalm ~ First impressions

What is the *tone* of Psalm 90? What stands out to you from your initial reading?

When contemplating the mounting instability of this life, we must be assured that God alone is our source of security and protection. People of all ages can find comfort by looking to Him in times of uncertainty. Ask the Lord to apply His comfort where you need it most today.

Put a psalm in your heart ~ (Memory verse) Psalm 90:12

(Write out the verse in the spaces below. Practice it each time you open your lesson.)

So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Moses believed in the permanence of God, that in a constantly changing world, from everlasting to everlasting, He is!

In stark contrast to the eternity of God, Moses compares the mortality of man in verses 3–6.

2. Looking from the perspective of God’s eternity, the psalmist says a thousand years are equivalent to a twenty-four-hour day, which quickly passes (v. 4). What other illustrations does he use in verses 5–6?

Pause & ponder ~

The pronoun “our” is used in verse 1 when Moses declares, “Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.” It identifies not only Moses but all of us as belonging to the household of faith. In other words, we are keeping company with the likes of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Moses and David, Peter and John, Paul and Barnabas, Mary and Martha. God sustained all of those who believed just as He will also sustain you. It is in Him that you live and move and have your being. What thoughts come to mind, knowing you are at home with these great saints of old?

II. We must value each day to gain a heart of wisdom.

While God’s people walked through the wilderness for forty years, their sin provoked God’s wrath, causing an entire generation to die without entering the Promised Land.

1. What does Moses explain about sin? vv. 7–8

Human life is shortened because it is spent under God’s judgment of sin, our years finished *like a sigh* (v. 9). Even godly men and women have a limited time—some seventy, some eighty years, but the most we have to show for it is *labor* (hard work) and *sorrow* (disappointment) and then death. These are the thoughts that Moses pondered as he wrote from his heart.

The point Moses drives home here is that people do not take seriously the wrath of God or the intensity of his anger over sin. We do not understand the power of His anger, nor do we give Him the reverence He is due!

2. In verse 12, Moses expresses the remedy for our dilemma; what is it?

God has fashioned our days for us, numbered them and weighed them in value, and we must learn to do the same!

Touchpoint~

The best use of one's life is to spend it for something that will outlast it. If you aren't investing your time and energy in the kingdom of God, you should be. Find out what your spiritual gifts are and get going. If you will take the first step, God will do the rest through you as you walk by faith. Determine today not to let another day go by without doing something to make a difference for Him! Please record your thoughts below.

III. God restores and establishes us by His mercy.

Moses concludes the psalm with a prayer for God's mercy and compassion. God's people had gone a long time without realizing His blessing: *Return, O Lord! How long? And have compassion on Your servants.*

1. In your own words, state the rest of Moses' prayer below . . .
 - a. v. 14:

 - b. v. 15:

 - c. v. 16:

 - d. v. 17:

Moses interceded for God to intervene and stop the suffering of His people that was the result of their sin against Him. Because they had turned their backs on God, the correction was painful. Rather than be consumed by His wrath, Moses makes a heartfelt plea for the Lord to *establish the work of our hands*, making their efforts and their lives worthwhile.

This psalm is a passionate plea for God's people to live their lives each day with an eternal perspective and a desire to please Him. Each one of us has a span of days and years allotted to us, divinely determined by God. The message here is clear: use your time wisely! Make good choices. Invest yourself not only in this world but in the world to come.

Pause & ponder ~

Perspective is crucial to the Christian! Your perspective determines how you see, the choices you make, and the way you live your life. Learn to live in the light of eternity—view your life from God's perspective.

Time is the most valuable commodity we possess. Each of us has the same twenty-four hours in a day; what's important is how you spend them. Ephesians 5:15–21 contains the answer from a practical perspective on how to walk in wisdom. Read the passage and then finish the verses.

- v. 15: *See then that you walk circumspectly . . .*

- v. 16: *redeeming the time . . .*

- v. 17: *Therefore do not be unwise . . .*

- v. 18: *And do not be drunk with wine . . .*

- v. 19: *speaking to one another in . . .*

- v. 20: *giving thanks always . . .*

- v. 21: *submitting to one another . . .*

- Personal: Which of the above are you moved to take to heart today? Why?

Live the psalm ~

Perhaps *you* have been living in disappointment, discouragement, and despair. This psalm is intended to get you to *look up* and see things from God's perspective. Time is short, you must live with your eyes focused on the next world—not this one. Don't live for the applause of men but rather the approval of God. Doing so will allow you to live with an eternal perspective in view. How has this psalm influenced your take on life? Please share below.

Pray the psalm ~

Ask God to help you stop wasting your time and invest wisely in His kingdom, in the things that matter most for eternity. He will help you to see your circumstances as He sees them. "Oh Lord, teach me to number my days, that I may gain a heart of wisdom."

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 12: Psalm 19

God's Unveiled Glory

Stay on the Path ~

On the fourth day of creation, *God said, 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth'; and it was so. Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also. God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth . . . And God saw that it was good* (Genesis 1:14–17, 18b) . Who can fathom the magnificent artistry of God? Look around and be amazed! Whether it's hanging the stars in the heavens, placing the planets in their orbit, or laying out earth's atmospheric conditions, God's handiwork is on display.

In Psalm 19, David gives a reason to praise. He records two means of divine revelation, inviting the reader to extol God by considering the majestic order of the skies and the perfection of the scriptures. God's non-verbal declaration of His power through created nature is contrasted by the supernatural revelation of Himself in His Word. This is divine glory unveiled.

God has made Himself known by His awesome creative power (vv.1–6) and through His written Word (vv.7–14). Both serve as a testimony to who He is and why He created us—to give Him glory! Any other major pursuit in life that becomes a priority—be it money, fame, possessions, pleasure—will fall short and detour us from becoming who and what God intends for us to be.

David reminds us in this psalm to respond appropriately to the truth that God exists and that He has chosen to reveal Himself in ways that are clearly identifiable and irrefutable. His world is a call to worship; His Word is a call to salvation.

Did you know ~

The regular practice of taking God's Word into your heart and mind will produce constant fruitful change in your daily life and in your walk with God. The contemplation and interpretation of the living Word will leave its mark—it is not possible to remain unchanged. "He is wisest who reads both the world-book and the Word-book as two volumes of the same work and feels concerning them, 'My Father wrote them both.'" (C. H. Spurgeon)

Psalm 19

The Perfect Revelation of the Lord

To the Chief Musician.
A Psalm of David.

1 The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament shows His handiwork.

2 Day unto day utters speech,
And night unto night reveals knowledge.

3 There is no speech nor language
Where their voice is not heard.

4 Their line has gone out through all
the earth,
And their words to the end of
the world.

In them He has set a tabernacle
for the sun,

5 Which is like a bridegroom coming
out of his chamber,
and rejoices like a strong man to run
its race.

6 Its rising is from one end of heaven,
And its circuit to the other end;
And there is nothing hidden from its heat.

7 The law of the Lord is perfect,
converting the soul;

The testimony of the Lord is sure,
making wise the simple;

8 The statutes of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart;

The commandment of the Lord is
pure, enlightening the eyes;

9 The fear of the Lord is clean,
enduring forever;

The judgments of the Lord are true
and righteous altogether.

10 More to be desired are they than gold,
Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and
the honeycomb.

11 Moreover by them Your servant
is warned,
And in keeping them there is
great reward.

12 Who can understand his errors?
Cleanse me from secret faults.
13 Keep back Your servant also from
presumptuous sins;
Let them not have dominion over me.
Then I shall be blameless,
And I shall be innocent of great
transgression.
14 Let the words of my mouth and the
meditation of my heart
Be acceptable in Your sight,
O Lord, my strength and my
Redeemer.

(Scripture from the New King James Bible, ©1980 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.)

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read Psalm 19.

Listen to the psalm ~ First impressions

What is the *tone* of Psalm 19? What stands out to you from your initial reading?

Do you long for God and His Word more than anything else in life? How has your pursuit of Him brought you satisfaction?

Put a psalm in your heart ~ (Memory verse) **Psalm 19:14**

(Write out the verse in the spaces below. Practice it each time you open your lesson.)

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord,
my strength and my Redeemer.*

These verses tell us that no one on planet earth is beyond the “voice” of God’s creation. The entire globe is exposed to God’s handiwork being evident: *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead”* (Romans 1:20).

2. David states that in the heavens God set a *tabernacle for the sun*, likening it to a tent in which He had placed a torch of light. What else does he say about it in verses 5–6?

The glory of God is clearly visible in the sun constantly at work, warming the four corners of the earth in its orbit. Similarly, God is constantly at work on mankind’s behalf, seeing to it that life is sustained by His gracious provision.

Pause & ponder ~

Think about it: the heavens narrate non-verbally but exquisitely that God exists. As you ponder, what do they tell *you* right now about God’s character (goodness, faithfulness, etc.)?

II. The Word reveals the work of His heart.

In verses 7–14, David shifts his focus to the glory of God revealed in His Word. While the heavens and the atmosphere declare the power of God, the Word of God reveals how to have a personal relationship with Him.

God’s Word is Perfect ~vv. 7–9

David uses six descriptions in speaking of the perfection and sufficiency of God’s Word. The descriptions are listed below; you are to add the action they perform.

v. 7: *The law of the Lord is perfect* _____

v. 7: *The testimony of the Lord is sure* _____

v. 8: *The statutes of the Lord are right* _____

v. 8: *The commandment of the Lord is pure* _____

v. 9: *The fear of the Lord is clean* _____

v. 9: *The judgments of the Lord are true* _____

Personal: The created sun lights our *outer world* while the revealed Word illumines our inner life. Pick one of the previously mentioned descriptions and state how it relates to your situation today.

God's Word is Precious ~v. 10

It is much more desirable than anything this world can offer. What two examples does David use to describe its value?

Personal: We make time for what is most precious to us. What does your quiet time say about the value of God's Word to *you*?

God's Word is Powerful ~vv. 11–14

What safeguard is there in the Word for every believer? v. 11

What benefit? _____

What does Scripture have the power to reveal? v. 12

The question, *Who can understand his errors?* (v.12) implies to us that the person who studies and meditates on God's Word will also receive its correction.

From what type of sin are we able to refrain? v. 13 What does this mean?

The power of the Word is able to protect the believer from participating in sin and preserve them blameless in the Lord's eyes. *Love has been perfected among us in this; that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world* (1 John 4:17).

David concludes the psalm with a prayer: *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight.* When the Word of God is applied through the power of God, the believer's mouth and heart are pleasing to Him.

What do the words *my Rock (strength)* and *Redeemer* (v.14) mean to you?

Touchpoint~

The Bible is the instrument by which God has chosen to reveal Himself to the world. Martin Luther said of it, "The Bible is alive, it speaks to me. It has feet, it runs after me. It has hands, it lays hold of me." As a *living book*, it is God-breathed. It speaks to your heart each time you open it. Take a moment to ponder the truth discovered in Hebrews 4:12 . . .

The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

In the space below, list the different aspects of God's Word described in this verse.

So powerful that it can discern the thoughts and intents of the heart; so practical that it becomes light on your daily path, counseling you on how you should live. Look up the following references in Psalm 119, noting the part God's Word plays in your spiritual growth.

v. 24 _____

v. 48 _____

v. 99 _____

v. 100 _____

v. 105 _____

v. 130 _____

Live the psalm ~

If you develop the daily discipline of spending time alone with the Lord you will, like David, find that it makes a difference. It revives your soul, makes you wise, brings you joy, gives clarity about sin, and builds godly character. Spending time in His Word creates the desire to want to be like Jesus. What area of your life is God currently working on? What change have you noticed lately?

Pray the psalm ~

If you are struggling about obeying God in an area of your life, note it below, confess it to Him, and ask Him to help you. You will be amazed at the power of His Word when you yield to Him.

Personal: If your path seems too difficult and you feel like giving up, perhaps it's because you do not have the assurance of knowing that you belong to God. Have you ever asked to receive Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? If not, you may do so today by praying this simple prayer:

Lord Jesus, I realize that I am a sinner in need of Your forgiveness. I want to invite You to be the Lord of my life today. Please cleanse me, forgive me, and fill me with Your Holy Spirit. Make the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart acceptable to You. Thank You for indwelling me and that I am born again!

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 13: Psalm 37

Spiritual Stability through Crisis

Stay on the Path ~

Winning isn't everything in life, finishing the race well is what matters. Applause, awards, and achievements are enjoyable for the moment but can be fleeting. Going the distance with the eternal prize in focus not only increases our faith, it develops character, perseverance and a passion for life. President Woodrow Wilson once said, "I had rather temporarily fail in a cause that will ultimately succeed than temporarily succeed in a cause that will ultimately fail."

In Psalm 37, David stresses that what is important is not an effort or a cause that begins well but rather one that ends well. Life is a work in progress, so what would help us through crisis circumstances is to learn to take a long look before drawing conclusions. Appearances can be deceiving; often things are not really what they seem. No matter what's going on around you, be assured that God is at work behind the scenes orchestrating events and people to accomplish His purpose and will.

No one likes to see the wicked prosper but that is often what happens, at the expense of the righteous. When the ungodly prosper the godly suffer, prompting the question, "Where is God?" In this psalm, David exhorts the believer not to become frustrated, but to be steadfastly focused on the Lord. Interestingly, this psalm is not modeled as a prayer to God but is directed to the reader. The believer is challenged to place our trust and faith in a loving heavenly Father, not to worry about the wicked. Their fate rests in God's ultimate judgment.

Did you know ~

Psalm 37 is an acrostic, in which every other verse begins with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It is a *wisdom* psalm, similar in style to what we see in the book of Proverbs. The contrast between the godly and ungodly is explored in depth along with an exhortation to trust in the Lord. Wisdom is critical to the believer; it is the ability to apply knowledge correctly in a manner that is pleasing to God. Wisdom instructs the believer to place God at the center of everything—all of life's choices, decisions, and pursuits.

Psalm 37

The Heritage of the Righteous and The Calamity of the Wicked

A Psalm of David.

1 Do not fret because of evildoers,
Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.
2 For they shall soon be cut down like the grass,
And wither as the green herb.

3 Trust in the Lord, and do good;
Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.

4 Delight yourself also in the Lord,
And He shall give you the desires of your heart.

5 Commit your way to the Lord,
Trust also in Him,
And He shall bring it to pass.

6 He shall bring forth your
righteousness as the light,
And your justice as the noonday.

7 Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him;
Do not fret because of him who
prosperes in his way,
Because of the man who brings
wicked schemes to pass.

8 Cease from anger, and forsake wrath;
Do not fret—it only causes harm.

9 For evildoers shall be cut off;
But those who wait on the Lord,
They shall inherit the earth.

10 For yet a little while and the wicked
shall be no more;
Indeed, you will look carefully for his place,
But it shall be no more.

11 But the meek shall inherit the earth,
And shall delight themselves in the
abundance of peace.

12 The wicked plots against the just,
And gnashes at him with his teeth.

13 The Lord laughs at him,
For He sees that his day is coming.

14 The wicked have drawn the sword
And have bent their bow,
To cast down the poor and needy,
To slay those who are of upright conduct.

15 Their sword shall enter their own heart,
And their bows shall be broken.

16 A little that a righteous man has
Is better than the riches of many wicked.
17 For the arms of the wicked shall be broken,
But the Lord upholds the righteous.

18 The Lord knows the day of the upright,
And their inheritance shall be forever.
19 They shall not be ashamed in the evil time,
And in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.
20 But the wicked shall perish;
And the enemies of the Lord,
Like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish.
Into smoke they shall vanish away.

21 The wicked borrows and does not repay,
But the righteous shows mercy and gives.
22 For those blessed by Him shall inherit the earth,
But those cursed by Him shall be cut off.

23 The steps of a good man are ordered
by the Lord,
And He delights in his way.
24 Thought he fall, he shall not be utterly
cast down;
For the Lord upholds him with His hand.

25 I have been young, and now am old;
Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken,
Nor his descendants begging bread.
26 He is ever merciful, and lends;
And his descendants are blessed.

27 Depart from evil and do good;
And dwell forevermore.

28 For the Lord loves justice,
And does not forsake His saints;
They are preserved forever;
But the descendants of the wicked
shall be cut off.

29 The righteous shall inherit the land,
And dwell in it forever.

30 The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom,
And his tongue talks of justice.

31 The law of his God is in his heart;
None of his steps shall slide.

32 The wicked watches the righteous,
And seeks to slay him.
33 The Lord will not leave him in his hand,
Nor condemn him when he is judged.

34 Wait on the Lord, and keep His way,
And He shall exalt you to inherit the land;
When the wicked are cut off, you shall see it.
35 I have seen the wicked in great power,
And spreading himself like a native green tree.
36 Yet he passed away, and behold,
he was no more;
Indeed I sought him, but he could not be found.

37 Mark the blameless man, and
observe the upright;
For the future of that man is peace.
38 But the transgressors shall be
destroyed together;
The future of the wicked shall be cut off.

39 But the salvation of the righteous
is from the Lord;
He is their strength in the time of trouble.
40 And the Lord shall help them and
deliver them;
He shall deliver them from the wicked,
And save them,
Because they trust in Him.

(Scripture from the New King James Bible, ©1980 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.)

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read Psalm 37.

Listen to the psalm ~ First impressions

What is the *tone* of Psalm 37? What stands out to you from your initial reading?

The word *fret* means to worry, fuss, agonize, to become vexed in spirit. To become *envious* is to be jealous, covetous, “green with envy”, and resentful. Such heart attitudes must not be part of the believer’s life; for what good does the wicked person’s prosperity do for them? It only hastens their ruin, not their reward.

2. In verses 3–8, David counsels the righteous on how we are to conduct ourselves in the world. List as many commands as you can find. Next to the action on the part of the believer, note in which verse it is found and God’s response if one is mentioned.

David’s advice

God’s response

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

3. In verses 7 and 8, the psalmist repeats the earlier command (v.1) saying, “do not fret.” What does fretting bring do to the believer? Think about it for a moment . . . in your opinion what kind of harm would it bring?

God’s people should not attempt to take matters into their own hands, rather we must learn to be still and wait patiently for the Lord.

4. Compare the outcome for the godly and the ungodly in verses 10–11.

Pause & ponder ~

In Matthew 5:1–12, Jesus modeled for His followers the way of wise living that pleases the Father. In the face of persecution and injustice, when we follow His example there is great comfort and reward. Read these verses with your own circumstances in view and finish the sentence, noting each blessing that God has for you.

- *Blessed are the poor in spirit* _____
- *Blessed are those who mourn* _____

- *Blessed are the meek* _____
- *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness* _____
- *Blessed are the merciful* _____
- *Blessed are the pure in heart* _____
- *Blessed are the peacemakers* _____
- *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake* _____
- *Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad* _____

II. God delights in the ways of the righteous. vv. 12–26

It could be said that David composed this psalm as a memorandum. Being advanced in age, he takes a look back at his own experience with God’s character and faithfulness. He issues a strong warning about the future of the ungodly along with an encouragement for the believer to look to the Lord.

1. Using verses 12–26, pick out the prominent words or phrases that depict the wicked, describing their attributes, actions and how God will deal with them.

2. Next, contrast the righteous, describing their attributes, actions, and God’s subsequent faithfulness to act on their behalf.

David emphasizes the blessing of the righteousness in these verses, saying the Lord delights in the steps of a good man, upholding him with His own hand.

Touchpoint~

In Psalm 37, David presents us with the man the Lord delights in (vv. 23–24) as well as the believer who delights in the Lord (v. 4). These verses mirror the words of Psalm 1:1, *Blessed is the man . . . whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.* In other words, the person who lives a God-centered life is blessed. This is the man or woman who hungers and thirsts after righteousness, who reads to study, who is saturated and filled by the Word, displaying clear evidence of God’s abiding presence.

- What promise is there for this person? v. 4

When one meditates in the Word day and night, it is because this kind of *soul* satisfaction is found only in the Lord. God gives the one who delights in Him the desires of their heart because their heart’s desire is for Him! When He is at the center of every aspect of your life as a Christian, He makes even your everyday choices His choices for you!

Look up the references below that speak about pleasures, gladness, goodness, and rejoicing. Think of them from a personal standpoint and note your findings.

a. Psalm 16:11 _____

b. Psalm 21:6 _____

c. Psalm 34:8 _____

d. Philippians 4:4 _____

e. Personal: Which of the above verses speaks to the need of your heart today? Why?

Advanced in age and looking back, David noted: *I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken.* They are merciful and lend freely, their abundance overflowing to their children (vv. 25–26).

III. You are called to wait in obedience on the Lord. vv. 27–40

David gives the reader good reason to be encouraged about life—God loves the righteous and will never forsake those who are His, but the godly must persevere in doing the will of God from the heart. When the Word is written on our hearts, God’s people speak and act wisely, standing firm (v. 30).

1. According to vv. 27–33, what does God think about justice?
 - a. What enables the righteous to promote justice? vv. 30–31
 - b. What do the wicked seek to do to the righteous that God will not permit? vv. 32–33

The psalmist concludes in vv. 34–40 by drawing the reader’s attention to the major points of the chapter: (1) It is God who delivers His people and administers justice; (2) God delights in the ways of the righteous; (3) Believers must remain obedient while waiting on the Lord.

2. Write a summary statement about the fate of the wicked from vv. 34–40.
 - a. What is the outcome for the “blameless” and “upright”?
3. What will the Lord do for the righteous in time of trouble? vv. 39–40

As Christians living in a wicked world, we are called upon to put our faith in the Lord to save, protect, strengthen, and deliver us in our times of need. Waiting is an expression of loyalty and submission to Him. He, in turn, never puts to shame or disappoints those who wait for Him!

Pause & ponder ~

Personal: You will only love the Lord to the degree that you obey Him. Keeping that thought in mind, to what degree are *you* obedient? Please share your thoughts.

Live the psalm ~

What is the desire of *your* heart today? You will find your soul satisfied only in Him. Do you long for Him more than anything else this world has to offer? Don't settle for anything less than what He wants you to have—abundance now and eternity with Him!

Pray the psalm ~

Pick the verse(s) in Psalm 37 that ministered to your heart this week; write them down in the space below. Lift them as a prayer to God, asking Him to help you find your delight in Him.

*Be on guard. Stand true to what you believe. Be courageous. Be strong.
And everything you do must be done in love.
1 Corinthians 16:13 NLT*

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 14: Psalm 2

God's Sovereign Rule

Stay on the Path ~

The commanding officer of an elite naval flagship ordered his radioman to send out a message to an obstacle that had appeared on the radar screen directly in the ship's oncoming path: "Move your vessel twenty degrees starboard." There was an immediate reply: "You move twenty degrees to your starboard." The angry officer shot back: "Tell him I am the admiral of this vessel, which is the flagship of the fleet!" Another reply was received: "I am Seaman 2nd Class James. You must change your course twenty degrees starboard immediately." The enraged officer ordered: "This is a battleship—we can and will blow you out of the water; change your course or else!" Seaman James radioed back: "This, sir, is a lighthouse!" And that ended the standoff, since there is no way a battleship can move a lighthouse! Such is the message of Psalm 2: rebellious mankind telling God to move out of the way, and God sending back the message to "change course or else."

The ongoing war of a lost world against God is epic. It is as old as time, extending all the way back to the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve first took matters into their own hands, exercising their free will to defy God's authority over their lives. The cosmic battle between good and evil has rendered countless novels, movies, and even today's version of video games; most of it for entertainment purposes but, the basic story line is not fiction or fantasy, it is actually quite real. No matter how depraved or determined man's attempts to overthrow God's rule may be, all such efforts will fail; for in the end every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Did you know ~

The book of Psalms contains more Messianic prophecies than any other Old Testament book, with the exception of Isaiah. Psalm 2 is a *royal psalm*, revealing the Messiah as the Son of God, the undisputed sovereign ruler over heaven and earth. The exact origin of this psalm is unknown, but the Apostles Peter and John ascribe its authorship to David (Acts 4:25). It looks prophetically ahead to the time when the Lord Jesus Christ—God's anointed, promised Messiah—takes center stage upon the earth. It depicts the ongoing rebellion of the world against God and His Son.

Psalm 2

The Messiah's Triumph and Kingdom

- 1 Why do the nations rage,
And the people plot a vain thing?
- 2 The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take counsel together,
Against the Lord and against His
Anointed, saying,
- 3 "Let us break Their bonds in pieces
And cast away Their cords from us."
- 4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;
The Lord shall hold them in derision.
- 5 Then He shall speak to them in
His wrath,
And distress them in His deep
displeasure:
- 6 "Yet I have set My King
On my holy hill of Zion."
- 7 "I will declare the decree:
The Lord has said to Me,
'You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You.
- 8 Ask of Me, and I will give You
The nations of the earth for Your
possession.
- 9 You shall break them with a
rod of iron;
You shall dash them to pieces like a
potter's vessel."
- 10 Now therefore, be wise, O kings;
Be instructed, you judges of the earth.
- 11 Serve the Lord with fear,
And rejoice with trembling.
- 12 Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,
And you perish in the way,
When His wrath is kindled but
a little.
- Blessed are all those who put
their trust in Him.

Learn the lessons of the psalm ~

Selah (Think about):

The rebellion against God the psalmist speaks about is a revolt against the Lord's reign over mankind that climaxed in the appearing of Jesus Christ upon the earth. It is key to note that the psalm represents four different speakers: *David*, speaking for mankind, *God*, *Jesus Christ*, and *the Holy Spirit*.

I. Man's revolt is against God ~ vv. 1–6

David first presents the voice of mankind expressing a united rebellion against God. He is astounded that people would join forces to seek to overthrow the Lord but that is what happened at His first appearance and what will ultimately take place again in the end times.

1. Who are those David mentions in verses 1–3 that plot conspiracy against God and His Anointed?
2. Verses 1–2 are repeated in Acts 4:25–26. According to verse 27, list all those who were united against the Lord.
3. Ultimately, a similar rebellion will join forces in the last days when the kings of the earth will again rise up against the Lord. What does it say in Revelation 17:7–15 about their authority and the one who overcomes them? See vv. 13–14.

David expresses absolute amazement that mankind's effort could be so organized, widespread, and premeditated! Thus we see depicted the natural depravity of humanity—the heart of man that turns away from God and His sovereign rule to seek self and pursue sin.

4. How do the following passages portray man's condition?
 - a. Psalm 14:1–3
 - b. Romans 3:10–18

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:21); such is our sinful condition as the result of original sin.

5. What is God's response to all such arrogant boastings by man? vv. 4–6

God's voice—the second speaker—ridicules man's absurd attempts to overthrow His divine purpose through acts of defiance. He laughs at men for such foolishness, but He doesn't stop there. God's laughter turns to offense and wrath and ultimate judgment, a side of Him which makes us feel uncomfortable.

His response to man's futile attempts to thwart His divine purpose is found in verse 6: *Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion.* This statement speaks first of Christ's rightful place and authority at the right hand of God, and ultimately to His enthronement during His one-thousand year reign from Jerusalem upon His return.

6. How do the following references confirm this as God's will?

a. Psalm 110:1–2

b. Acts 2:34–35

c. Revelation 20:1–6

Pause & ponder ~

Today perhaps more than ever, rebellion against God is alive and well! The Bible is under attack by individuals and groups seeking not only to deny God's presence and power, but to remove all existence of Him and His Word from modern day society. We live in an age of subjective morality which allows people to decide what is right and what is wrong. Many turn away from what the Bible has to say about sin, the sanctity of marriage, homosexuality, respect for authority, salvation and God's impending judgment. The world stage is set for the final rebellion; people are uniting together in a common hatred toward God. As you watch the signs of the times unfold, how do they affect *your* worldview? Are you more motivated to live a life of holiness? Please share your thoughts.

II. *God's invitation is to embrace the Son* ~ vv. 7–12

The third speaker in vv.7–9 is Jesus Himself. Everything that the Father purposed and planned, the Son will proclaim and accomplish.

1. What did the Father speak to the Son? v. 7 (See also Hebrews 1:5; Acts 13:33.)

The fulfillment of this decree came about in Christ's incarnation. This is the reason the Father said, *Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession* (v. 8). It is a reference to Christ's inheritance spoken of in Revelation 11:15: *The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!*

2. What does the Bible have to say about the Lord's inheritance?

- a. John 6:37, 39:

- b. John 17:2, 24

3. What does Psalm 2:9 say about the Son's rule over His enemies?

His final judgment is compared to a potter taking an iron scepter and dashing His enemies to pieces like they were clay pottery (Revelation 19:15).

The identity of the fourth speaker is not specifically mentioned but is likely that of the Holy Spirit, issuing an invitation for sinners to forsake their rebellion and humbly submit to the Son before it is too late.

4. Put the instructions found in verse 11 in your own words . . .

- a. *Serve the Lord with fear*— _____

- b. *Rejoice with trembling*— _____

Touchpoint~

Kiss the Son, let He be angry and perish in the way. The kiss referred to here is that of surrender to a sovereign on bended knee. It is not the kiss of a friend but rather the kiss of obedience to a higher authority; that's why it is accompanied by *fear* and *trembling*. And although we deserve God's wrath for our sin of rebellion against Him, God is pleased when we take refuge in Him: *Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him* (v.12). Have you made a complete surrender to the Lord? If not, don't hesitate; do it today. Record your thoughts below.

Live the psalm ~

In what way does God's sovereign rule over your life bring comfort and peace to your heart while the world around you is in chaos?

Pray the psalm ~

Is there someone you are aware of right now that is rebelling against God's authority? Note their name below and pray for them, asking God to perhaps give you the opportunity to witness to them.

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 15: Psalm 119:89–112

Pursuing and Practicing God's Word

Stay on the Path ~

The Bible is unlike any other literary work; and if we are to be in a relationship with God, we must learn to not only read but apply what He has written. Reading through the pages of Scripture to acquire knowledge about God is a good thing, but knowledge not applied can become a burden and a snare. Too many believers have only head knowledge of God when what they really need is the heart application of His Word to daily life. This involves a purposeful commitment to obey God's Word that results in being taught by Him.

I am Yours; rescue me! For I have worked hard at obeying your commandments (Psalm 119:94 NLT). Verse 94 in the New Living Translation translates the verb *worked hard* as, "to consult, to inquire, to beat a path, to read repeatedly." This speaks to the believer who "beat a path" to the Word with the intention to read, study, and apply it diligently. The Bible is the one book we should all read with great reverence and awe, not the way we would scan the latest news edition or speed read for information. When we open our heart to God's Word, He opens His mouth and speaks to us.

We Christians do not go to the Bible to find the escape hatch to life but rather to be strengthened to face life's difficulties and grow in our relationship with God. When we can't find a reason to delight in our circumstances, we can find many reasons in the Word to delight in God and His purpose. Growing spiritually means being willing to step outside of our self-controlled comfort zone and follow Him—wherever He leads. Here in Psalm 119, the psalmist leads us to some breathtaking affirmations that anchor us to heaven while enabling us to be useful to God while here on earth.

Did you know ~

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the book and the one that most magnifies the Word of God. It professes the all-sufficiency of Scripture by extolling its perfections. If God's people will open up to the truths contained in these verses, God will add to our lives the blessings contained herein. The Spirit of God writes the Word of God on our hearts, making us want to obey: *And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image* (2 Corinthians 3:18b NLT). Let's purpose this week to *appreciate—apprehend—and apply* God's truth to every part of our lives!

Psalm 119:89–112

Meditations on the Excellencies of the Word of God

- 89 Forever, O Lord,
Your word is settled in heaven.
- 90 Your faithfulness endures to all
generations;
You established the earth,
and it abides.
- 91 They continue this day according to
Your ordinances,
For all are Your servants.
- 92 Unless Your law had been my delight,
I would then have perished in
my affliction.
- 93 I will never forget Your precepts,
For by them You have given me life.
- 94 I am Yours, save me;
For I have sought Your precepts.
- 95 The wicked wait for me to destroy me,
But I will consider Your testimonies.
- 96 I have seen the consummation
of all perfection,
But Your commandment is
exceedingly broad.
- 97 Oh, how I love Your law!
It is my meditation all the day.
- 98 You, through Your commandments,
make me wiser than all my enemies;
For they are ever with me.
- 99 I have more understanding than
all my teachers,
For Your testimonies are my
meditation.
- 100 I understand more than the ancients,
Because I keep Your precepts.
- 101 I have restrained my feet from every
evil way,
That I may keep Your word.
- 102 I have not departed from Your judgments,
For You Yourself have taught me.
- 103 How sweet are Your words to my taste,
Sweeter than honey to my mouth!
- 104 Through Your precepts I get
understanding;
Therefore I hate every false way.

105 Your word is a lamp to my feet
And a light to my path.
106 I have sworn and confirmed
That I will keep Your righteous
judgments.
107 I am afflicted very much;
Revive me, O Lord, according to
Your word.
108 Accept, I pray, the freewill offerings
of my mouth, O Lord,
and teach me Your judgments.
109 My life is continually in my hand,
Yet I do not forget Your law.
110 The wicked have laid a snare for me,
Yet I have not strayed from Your precepts.
111 Your testimonies I have taken as a
heritage forever,
For they are the rejoicing
of my heart.
112 I have inclined my heart to perform
Your statutes
Forever, to the very end.

(Scripture from the New King James Bible, ©1980 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.)

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read Psalm 119:89–112.

Listen to the psalm ~ First impressions

What is the *tone* of Psalm 119:89–112? What stands out from your initial reading?

Put a psalm in your heart ~ (Memory verse) **Psalm 119:102**

(Write out the verse in the spaces below. Practice it each time you open your lesson.)

I have not departed from Your judgments, for You Yourself have taught me.

Just as life was first evidenced by God's spoken word, even so the psalmist here states that God's precepts (v.93) preserve, protect, and provide for the believer.

3. Personal: Do *you* ever question the faithfulness of God in your trials? Could it be perhaps that in your weakness you fail to appropriate God's strength? Look at Isaiah 40:28–31. What happens to the one who relies on the Lord?

The phrase “renew their strength” in verse 31 actually means *they will exchange their strength for His!* Wouldn't you rather operate in His strength rather than your own?

- a. To apply these verses would make what kind of difference in your life?

4. What does Jesus have to say about the enduring Word in Matthew 24:35?

5. Isaiah 55:10–11 contain a truth and a promise; what do you find here?

II. God's Word Fully Satisfies. vv. 97–104

The psalmist declares his love and devotion to God's Word, adding that its sweetness brings clarity and understanding far surpassing that of his teachers.

Tasting God's Word for yourself brings a sense of sweetness and satisfaction to life that nothing else will: *Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good* (Psalm 34:8). The Word becomes even more precious and pleasing as you continue to meditate on it throughout your day.

1. Read through verses 97–104 carefully again. What new realization is there for *you* today as you feed on the Word?

Live the psalm ~

The reason we feed on God's Word is so that we might get to know Him intimately as we grow in grace, becoming more like Him each day. His desire is that we would grow to maturity in our walk; our desire for His Word becomes our delight in Him! Choose a verse(s) you would like to apply this week and write it below. How will you purpose to live it out?

Pray the psalm ~

Now ask God for the power of His Spirit to enable you to live what you are learning. Compose your prayer below and lift it to Him.

To know Him is to love Him;
To love Him is to obey Him;
To obey Him is to become like Him.

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 16: Psalm 51

The Path of Forgiveness

Stay on the Path ~

The marble yard of Florence, Italy, is where an aspiring artist would go to cast a discerning eye over innumerable slabs of stone in anticipation of finding the one that would challenge his craftsmanship while at the same time attract the world's attention. There Michelangelo saw the Duccio block, a seventeen foot tall massive piece of stunning marble. Many craftsmen would look but pass it by once the enormous gouge in its center came into view. Michelangelo saw the severe flaw but he saw more, much more. He realized it contained a larger-than-life depiction of David that just needed to be let out. This master artist moved the stone into his studio, setting his heart and hands to the task and, as he did, the cold stone took on a breathtaking life form, a masterpiece unrivaled in modern time.

Similar to the slab of marble bearing his name, David had a serious flaw that almost ruined him. Had not his Master intervened, he may never have found the way to repentance and restoration. Psalm 51 contains David's humble prayer of confession for forgiveness after the worst moral failure of his life. He wrote it looking back on his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and subsequent murder of her husband Uriah that resulted in David breaking numerous commandments of the Lord. After harboring and hiding his sin for a year, God sent the prophet Nathan to confront David, leading him to repent.

The message of Psalm 51 is that no matter how egregious the sin, all who come to God in a spirit of brokenness and humility can appeal for forgiveness. The psalm stands as a paradigm of prayer that has been used by saints of all ages to turn the course of their lives back to the Lord. Countless people have been comforted and encouraged to know that if David could be forgiven, they can too. The appeal to God's compassion, mercy and grace can lead not only to forgiveness but also to restoration of a Spirit-filled life of fellowship and service.

Did you know ~

Psalm 51 is one of 116 other psalms that have a superscription added to the beginning of the psalm that provides a notation identifying the author, historical context, and how it is to be sung. These were added at a later date and were included to assist the worship leader as the congregation sang them in praise to God.

Psalm 51

A Prayer of Repentance

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David
when Nathan the prophet went to Him,
after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

1 Have mercy upon me, O God,
According to Your lovingkindness;
According to the multitude of Your
tender mercies,

Blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I acknowledged my transgressions,
And my sin is always before me.

4 Against You, You only, have I sinned,
And done this evil in Your sight—
That You may be found just when
You speak,
And blameless when You judge.

5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me.

6 Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts,
And in the hidden part You will make
me to know wisdom.

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 Make me hear joy and gladness,
That the bones You have broken may
rejoice.

9 Hide Your face from my sins,
And blot out all my iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

11 Do not cast me away from Your presence,
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.

13 Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners shall be converted to You.

14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
The God of my salvation,
And my tongue shall sing aloud of
Your righteousness.

15 O Lord, open my lips,
And my mouth shall show forth
Your praise.
16 For You do not desire sacrifice, or else
I would give it;
You do not delight in burnt offering.
17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,
A broken and a contrite heart—
These, O God, You will not despise.

18 Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion;
Build the walls of Jerusalem.
19 Then You shall be pleased with the
sacrifices of righteousness,
With burnt offering and whole
burnt offering;
Then they shall offer bulls on
Your altar.

(Scripture from the New King James Bible, ©1980 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.)

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read Psalm 51.

Listen to the psalm ~ First impressions

What is the *tone* of Psalm 51? What stands out to you from your initial reading?

Put a psalm in your heart ~ (Memory verse) **Psalm 51:10**

(Write out the verse in the spaces below. Practice it each time you open your lesson.)

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast
spirit within me.*

II. Forgiveness involves the confession of sin. vv. 3–6

Take a few minutes to read the account of David's sin in 2 Samuel 11:1–27 and 12:1–15. By committing adultery and murder, David crossed the line God had drawn in the law. He had missed the mark God had set for him by willfully rebelling and giving over to sin. Since there was no atonement provided in the law for such deliberate sin (Leviticus 20:10; Numbers 35:31–32), David's only hope was to appeal to God's mercy and grace. Notice that by accepting responsibility for his sin, David fully understood the gravity of it as well as the enormous consequence he had to pay.

1. Pick out the words that reveal David understood the enormity of his sin.
 - a. v. 3:

 - b. v. 4:

 - c. v. 5:

2. With full understanding that he had been living a lie, what does David declare that God wants from him? v. 6

The word *truth* (Hebrew *emet*) speaks of dependability, firmness, certainty, or faithfulness. It is an aspect of God's own character and a characteristic of those who belong to Him. Here in verse 6, it is used specifically to refer to that which conforms to the high standard God expects.

Pause & ponder ~

It is presumptuous to think that we know the extent to which we would go; the lines we think we would not cross when tempted by sin. The Bible says only God knows the heart of man and He is very specific in determining that it is evil in nature. Jeremiah 17:9 says, *The heart is **deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?*** Briefly define the words in bold print.

- *deceitful*—

- *desperately wicked*—

*I, the Lord, **search** the heart; I **test** the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.*

- The consideration of David's sin in the context of the above verse is a wake-up call to appeal for forgiveness on the basis of God's mercy and grace alone, not on our own merit. If left to ourselves, we would all merit judgment. Do you have something to confess to Him today? Does this move you to appeal to God's **grace**—*God's riches at Christ's expense*?

III. Forgiveness requires the need for cleansing. vv. 7–12

David's sins had taken a toll by affecting his whole person: his eyes (v.3), mind (v.6), ears and bones (v.8; see also Psalm 32:3–4), heart and spirit (v.10), hands (v.14), and lips (vv.13–15). David wanted his entire being completely cleansed—the stain of sin removed so that he could be fully restored.

Verse 7 contains an additional plea for pardon. David likens himself spiritually to that of a leper, using a hyssop branch dipped in blood and sprinkled seven times on the person at the altar (Leviticus 14:6).

1. What is the anticipated result of the forgiveness David seeks? v. 8 (See also Psalm 32:1–2.)

The sins that were always in front of David's face he requests to be removed from God's—blotting them out so that God would no longer see them!

2. Having confessed his sins and received God's forgiveness, what is David's prayer?
 - a. v. 10:
 - b. v. 11:
 - c. v. 12:

Pause & ponder ~

God's law demands that "almost all things are purified with blood; and without shedding of blood there is no remission . . . so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (Hebrews 9:22, 28). Today believers find cleansing in the atoning work Jesus accomplished on the cross. What do the following scripture passages reveal to you about this completed work?

- Hebrews 10:19–23
-
-

- Hebrews 4:14–16
-
-

- 1 John 1:5–10
-
-

The heart of the matter is the matter of the heart! Today the Holy Spirit indwells every believer's heart forever (John 14:15–18), but it's possible to hinder the Spirit's effectiveness.

Touchpoint~

Look up the references that pertain to the believer hindering the sanctifying work of the Spirit, noting your findings below.

- a. Ephesians 4:30–32

- b. Acts 5:1–3

- c. 1 Thessalonians 5:19

- d. Personal: Has God's Spirit pointed to one of these as pertaining to *you*?

Be encouraged believer! A *steadfast spirit* or a *loyal spirit* (v.10) speaks of one that is not in bondage but is free, yielded to God's Spirit and willing to obey: *For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ*" (Romans 8:15–17).

IV. Forgiveness is followed by a commitment to holiness. vv. 12–19

David makes a promise while reaffirming his commitment to holiness.

1. What does David promise to do? v. 13
2. Psalm 32 is the fulfillment of David's vow to communicate God's truth. Read through the psalm, concentrating on verses 8–11. What specifically did David tell God's people in fulfillment of his vow?

David wanted to sing the Lord's praises and witness to the lost and those that had wandered away from God.

The process of appealing for God's mercy and receiving His forgiveness had brought about the realization that sacrifices would not please Him (vv.14–15), and that the blood of animals could not wash away his sin.

3. David was not denying the validity of making sacrifices. What was he affirming? v.17

People tend to think that sin only affects the person committing the act; but the Bible teaches otherwise. David was aware of the connection between his holiness as king of Israel and the blessing of God upon His people. We see in this that the sins of those in leadership directly affect the lives of those around them! First things first—once David was restored and renewed, he prayed that Zion would prosper and the walls of Jerusalem would be protected from the enemy.

After forgiveness comes the sacrifices of obedience performed with a heart that is right with God. David had that assurance and you can have it too!

Live the psalm ~

The flaw of unconfessed sin in your life can deal a blow that harms and hinders the effectiveness of the Spirit working in you and in others affected by your sin. If you have been resisting the Lord, not yielding to Him in an area of your life, now is the time to acknowledge it to yourself and confess it to Him.

Pray the psalm ~

Forgiveness is only a prayer away—you have the choice to allow the Master to make a masterpiece out of your life. In return for repentance and a right heart, He promises to perfect—to bring to completion everything pertaining to your life. You are being made in the likeness of Him—hold still and let Him work!

*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God,
You will not despise.
Psalm 51:17 NIV*

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 17: Psalm 121

God's Promise for the Journey

Stay on the Path ~

The picture David paints for the reader in Psalm 121 is from the vantage point of standing in the Jericho Valley, some twelve hundred feet below sea level, gazing upward to the mountains surrounding Jerusalem. Walking this path would mean a potential encounter with the likes of wild animals, robbers, and rocky places in which one could stumble and fall. Visually a long, grueling, difficult climb lay ahead; spiritually there would come the affirmation that God was there all the time!

If you knew before you set out on your Christian walk how challenging the journey would be at times—would you have committed to making the trip? If you became aware early on of the slippery, uneven places and just how dangerous the path could become—would you make the same choices? Obstacles have a way of testing even the most ardent climber, but it is precisely those hurdles that can either make or break a person's resolve to go higher and reach the summit. Fortunately for the believer, we walk by faith and not by sight. What's up ahead or around the bend is doable when God is with us, making it more than worth the effort. *Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them who love Him* (1 Corinthians 2:9). The key to success in the climb is to *stay on the path* and keep your focus on the Lord. Let Him lead you to higher ground where you will thoroughly enjoy the view from "Mt. Perspective."

Did you know ~

Psalm 121 is one of fifteen Songs of Ascents (Psalms 120-134) that were sung at three annual festival processions as the Israelite pilgrims ascended to Jerusalem to worship God. It begins with an acknowledgment of God as Creator and ends with a declaration of personal trust in His providential care.

Psalm 121

God the Help of Those Who Seek Him
A Song of Ascents.

1 I will lift up my eyes to the hills—
From whence comes my help?
2 My help comes from the Lord,
Who made heaven and earth.

3 He will not allow your foot to be moved;
He who keeps you will not slumber.
4 Behold, He who keeps Israel
Shall neither slumber nor sleep.

5 The Lord is your keeper;
The Lord is your shade at your right hand.
6 The sun shall not strike you by day,
Nor the moon by night.

7 The Lord shall preserve you from all evil;
He shall preserve your soul.
8 The Lord shall preserve your going
out and your coming in
from this time forth, and
even forevermore.

(Scripture from the New King James Bible, ©1980 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.)

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read Psalm 121.

Listen to the psalm ~ First impressions

What is the *tone* of Psalm 121? What stands out to you from your initial reading?

2. Personal: Perhaps today you are facing a mountain—an insurmountable obstacle is up ahead and you don't know what to do next. If you can't see your way around it, stop now and acknowledge it and your inability to do anything about it in your own strength. Declare out loud by faith, "My help comes from the Lord."

The word *help* (*eger*) means *to help* or *to support*. It is used repeatedly in the psalms to refer to God's divine intervention on behalf of His people.

3. How is the word *help* used in each of the following psalms?

- a. Psalm 33:20

- b. Psalm 70:5

- c. Psalm 115:9–11

- d. Psalm 124:8

- e. Psalm 146:5–6

God does not promise His people that they will walk an easy path to enter His presence. In fact, the Bible says, "*We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God*" (Acts 14:22). What He does promise is His presence to go with us every step of the way!

Pause & ponder ~

The Temple in Jerusalem was close to the heart of God's people. As they traveled there to worship, observing it in the distance from the hills, they would be encouraged to know that God's abiding presence was in His sanctuary to help and bless them. The reward of His presence made the difficult journey worthwhile.

4. Look up the verses from the psalms that talk about God's abiding presence. Note your findings below.

- a. Psalm 3:4

- b. Psalm 20:2

- c. Psalm 46:1–2 _____

- d. Psalm 124:8 _____

- e. Psalm 134:3 _____

- f. Solomon, David's son, prayed a prayer at the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem. What was the essence of its importance? See 1Kings 8:26–30.

Remember, what you see as an obstacle, God views as an opportunity! If you haven't yet caught sight of God in the midst of your dilemma, keep on going, you will!

II. My Maker is my Keeper on the journey. vv. 3–4

Looking at the hills doesn't give God's people strength; it only focuses our attention on the problems up ahead. It is as we put our feet on the path and begin to move forward that we realize God is not only our Helper, He is also our Protector.

1. In what way is the believer assured of God's providential care? v. 3

When walking across rocky, uneven places, God is concerned about your well-being. He watches how you walk through this world. *He will not allow your foot to be moved* (v.3). The potential for harm is great but God will not allow you to stumble—to *slip* or *slide*, *stagger*, or *to be shaken*.

2. What is God's ultimate goal for you? See Jude 24–25.

3. What does this psalm say about God's watch over you? v. 4

The psalmist could lay his head down in sweet sleep under the stars knowing the Lord was watching over him.

Pause & ponder ~

Think about it: How many nights have you willed yourself to sleep only to toss and turn with anxiety and worry over your problems? How many times have you been awakened in the middle of the night by the unresolved tension and turmoil of the day? There is really no reason for both you and God to stay awake. He is already up watching over you and working out your circumstances. He would have *you* trust Him and get a good night's sleep! Record what He ministers to your heart.

III. My Maker is my Preserver on the Journey. vv. 6–8

The Lord “keeps” or “watches” over His people as a shepherd watches over his sheep. The Keeper of Israel is also *your* keeper, protecting you from danger on the journey both day and night. The dangers of sunstroke were very real to the traveler in Palestine, but the Lord is *your shade at your right hand*.

1. Why do you need not be afraid? Psalm 91:1–2

There was a belief in biblical times that the moon could affect a person's mental and emotional stability. The word *lunacy* comes from the Latin word *luna*, for moon. The application for us today is simply that nothing—day or night, sleeping or awakening, can harm God's child. Your difficulties may hurt but won't harm you with God at your right hand. It is His responsibility to preserve your soul—your going out and your coming in.

Pause & ponder ~

The Christian life is an uphill climb. Psalm 121 reveals how to let God help you on the journey. Your challenge is to ask Him for strength and enabling during the day and trust Him for peaceful rest at night. He stands ready to help as you yield to Him. Jesus promised His followers, “*Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:20). Please share your thoughts.

Live the psalm ~

What aspect of God's persistent providential care is most comforting to you today: His help; His keeping; His preservation? Please explain why.

Pray the psalm ~

Take the aspect of God's care you wrote about above and put it in the form of a prayer of praise and thanksgiving, lifting it to Him from a grateful heart.

And I am convinced and sure of this very thing, that He Who began a good work in you will continue until the day of Jesus Christ [right up to the time of His return], developing [that good work] and perfecting and bringing it to full completion in you.

Philippians 1:6 AMP

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 18: Psalm 102

A Season of Prayer

Stay on the Path ~

The superscription to Psalm 102 entitles it as “a prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed and pours out his complaint before the Lord.” There is no other psalm in Scripture with this heading. In it the psalmist depicts a season of tremendous adversity when he is distraught and without answers. He realizes the only thing he can do about his condition and his circumstances is to pray—pray—pray.

When life gets tough time can drag on endlessly . . . minutes become hours turning into days, then months, and even years, from which there seems to be no end to the suffering. Physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually, desolation and brokenness take over until the only relief comes as the sufferer turns to talk to God about his despair.

This psalm is an encouragement to every believer that God knows our frame and He allows us to be human. He wants us to tell Him how we feel, what we’re thinking, what we hope for, and most of all that we want His supreme will above our own. As we talk to Him, He talks to us. The Holy Spirit takes our clumsy words and intercedes on our behalf, bearing witness to us through His language of comfort and faith. Ultimately, He brings us through to the place of experientially realizing that He has been working all things out for our future good. The prayer that was begun in despair ends on a high note of praise!

Did you know ~

Psalm 102 is designated as one of the seven penitential psalms (Ps 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143). It is classified in this category because it focuses on the personal suffering brought about by the consequence of sin. The structure consists of both a lament and a prophetic hymn. God’s people believed they had been rejected by Him because of their disobedience. The psalmist’s purpose was to reignite a fire in the hearts of the people to begin to once again hope in the Lord’s promises.

Psalm 102

The Lord's Eternal Love
A Prayer of the afflicted, when he
is overwhelmed and pours out his
complaint before the Lord.

- 1 Hear my prayer, O Lord,
And let my cry come to You..
- 2 Do not hide Your face from me
in the day of my trouble;
Incline Your ear to me;
In the day that I call,
answer me speedily.
- 3 For my days are consumed
like smoke,
And my bones are burned like a hearth.
- 4 My heart is stricken and withered
like grass,
So that I forget to eat my bread.
- 5 Because of the sound of my groaning
My bones cling to my skin.
- 6 I am like a pelican of the wilderness;
I am like an owl of the desert.
- 7 I lie awake,
And am like a sparrow alone
on the housetop.
- 8 My enemies reproach me all day long;
Those who deride me swear an oath
against me.
- 9 For I have eaten ashes like bread,
And mingled my drink with weeping.
- 10 Because of Your indignation and
Your wrath;
For You have lifted me up and
cast me away.
- 11 My days are like a shadow
that lengthens,
And I wither away like grass .
- 12 But You, O Lord, shall endure forever,
And the remembrance of Your name
to all generations.
- 13 You will arise and have mercy on Zion;
For the time to favor her,
Yes, the time, has come.
- 14 For Your servants take pleasure in
her stones,
and show favor to her dust.

15 So the nations shall fear the name
of the Lord,
And all the kings of the earth
Your glory.

16 For the Lord shall build up Zion;
He shall appear in His glory.

17 He shall regard the prayer of the
destitute,
And shall not despise their prayer.

18 This will be written for the generation
to come,
that a people yet to be created
may praise the Lord.

19 For He looked down from the height
of His sanctuary;
From heaven the Lord viewed
the earth,

20 To hear the groaning of the prisoner,
To release those appointed to death,

21 To declare the name of the Lord
in Zion,
And His praise in Jerusalem,

22 When the peoples are gathered
together,
And the kingdoms, to serve the Lord.

23 He weakened my strength in the way;
He shortened my days.

24 I said, "Oh my God,
Do not take me away in the midst of
my days;
Your years are throughout all
generations.

25 Of old You laid the foundation
of the earth,
And the heavens are the work of
Your hands.

26 They will perish, but You will endure;
Yes, they will all grow old like
a garment;
Like a cloak You will change them,
And they will be changed.

27 But You are the same,
And Your years will have no end.

28 The children of Your servants will
continue, and their
descendants will be
established before You."

Learn the lessons of the psalm ~

Selah (Think about):

Psalm 102 was written during one of the lowest points in the history of God's people. The setting for this psalm took place during the Babylonian captivity when the people were taken away as prisoners to a foreign land, making it appear that God had turned away from them. His house lay in ruins, the city of Jerusalem was destroyed, and the people were in despair. But God would not leave them there . . .

I. There is despair apart from God's divine intervention. vv. 1–11

The psalmist launches into an emotional plea for help, turning to God to intervene and bring an end to the suffering and captivity: *Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come to You* (v.1). They are the words of someone who hears only silence from heaven—God is not listening.

1. In verse 2, the psalmist gets specific, pressing his plea. What does he urge God to do? Notice the increasing intensity of his words.

2. The metaphors in this psalm are numerous, revealing the frailty and transitory nature of life. To what does the psalmist liken his life in the following:
 - a. v. 3a: *My days*—
 - b. v. 3b: *My bones*—
 - c. v. 4: *My heart*—
 - d. v. 5: *My groaning*—

In verses 6–8, the psalmist's life is compared to that of a bird. Unable to rest, he desires the warmth of fellowship and home but instead experiences uncomfortable loneliness and the deafening sound of silence.

3. How does he describe his condition in the following? (Picture in your mind the habitat of the bird's existence.)
 - a. v. 6:

 - b. v. 7:

 - c. v. 8:

 - d. Personal: A *pelican*, an *owl*, a *sparrow*; each isolated and alone. When did you experience similar circumstances to that of the psalmist? Briefly explain.

4. From verses 8–11, summarize the psalmist's end apart from God's divine intervention.

Alone, his enemies taunting him, the psalmist acknowledges his suffering, unable to even think about eating or sleeping. Fearing he might die before seeing God intervene, he desperately calls upon the Lord to make Himself known.

How encouraging, even exhilarating, that this psalm does not end at verse 11. Although pain is very real, the power of God is even more real! In spite of his predicament and uncertainty, the psalmist gains sight of the fact that God is still on the throne reigning over all. He reverently reminds God that it is time to show His favor upon His people.

II. There is hope in God's unalterable plan. vv. 12–22

The temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Babylonians, the city walls torn down, God's work had halted, but the time would soon come when God would restore, revealing His glory.

1. Because the Lord endures forever, what does the psalmist say will take place in the future, fulfilling His purpose?
 - a. vv. 12–13:
 - b. vv. 14–15:
 - c. vv. 16–17:

Believing in hope, the psalmist declares that a future generation would live to see God's holy city restored and His people returned. God would look down from heaven to hear their groans, releasing them from captivity. In return, the people would serve Him, praising His name (vv. 19–22).

Pause & ponder ~

If your circumstances seem to have made a prisoner out of you, turn this time of pain into a season of prayer. Press in . . . draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Take some time to meditate on Luke 11:9–13. *Ask—seek—knock—consider* the progression in prayer. When you *ask*, you recognize your inability to meet your need; when you *seek*, you realize you must look to God alone for the answer; when you *knock*, you become persistent in your request until God opens the door and supplies the answer! Share a time recently when you prayed and God answered.

Live the psalm ~

Remember that Psalm 102 gives you permission to be human—to talk to God on that level. He expects you to be blatantly honest, down to your doubts and lack of faith in times of trouble. What is the take-away truth you'd like to apply from the psalm?

Pray the psalm ~

Tell the Lord in prayer what you wrote down in the *Live the Psalm* section above. Dare to be transparent—hold nothing back. Continue to *ask*, *seek*, and *knock* until the answer comes.

Hope defined: ***Holding on [with] patient expectation!***
Catherine Martin

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 19: Psalm 5

In the Morning

Stay on the Path ~

A daily appointment with God is not an option for anyone desiring to grow close in their walk with Him. There is no time when He is not available—morning, noon, and night He is always on call. But to the Christian who makes Him first priority in the morning there comes the absolute assurance of God's presence throughout the day. The high priest of the Old Testament laid the burnt offering on the altar at the first light of day, revealing a picture of total dedication and obedience to God. The New Testament passage of Romans 12:1–2 depicts the equivalent for the believer: *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

Does God hear your voice of praise and petition every morning? If you want to have a good day no matter what your circumstances, start by giving yourself to the Lord as that living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, which is your reasonable act of service to Him. Beginning your day at the altar will prompt His peace, increase your ability to trust Him by faith at every turn, and result in overflowing joy for you and perhaps even those around you.

Did you know ~

Psalm 5 is a prayer of David offered up at a time when he was exposed to danger from his enemies. It is considered an *individual lament* psalm, meaning that it reveals a cry of help to God out of distress. Often a lament psalm will be prefaced by a short summary of its direction followed by a full description of the difficulty. Accompanying the plea is an expression of confident trust in God's ability to answer as well as heartfelt praise that He will answer. Some versions of praise are in the form of a vow that would be shared in the midst of the congregation when God did answer the prayer.

Psalm 5

A Prayer of Guidance
To the Chief Musician. With Flutes.
A Psalm of David.

1 Give ear to my words, O Lord,
Consider my meditation.

2 Give heed to the voice of my cry,
My King and my God,
For to You I will pray.

3 My voice You shall hear in the
morning, O Lord;
In the morning I will direct it to You,
And I will look up.

4 For You are not a God who takes
pleasure in wickedness,
Nor shall evil dwell with You.

5 The boastful shall not stand in Your sight;
You hate all workers of iniquity.

6 You shall destroy those who speak
falsehood;
The Lord abhors the bloodthirsty
and deceitful man.

7 But as for me, I will come into Your
house in the multitude of your mercy;
In fear of You I will worship toward
Your holy temple.

8 Lead me, O Lord, in Your
righteousness because of
my enemies;
Make Your way straight before
my face.

9 For there is no faithfulness in
their mouth;
Their inward part is destruction;
Their throat is an open tomb;
They flatter with their tongue.

10 Pronounce them guilty, O God!
Let them fall by their own counsels;
Cast them out in the multitude of
their transgressions,
For they have rebelled against You.

11 But let all those rejoice who put
their trust in You;
Let them ever shout for joy, because
You defend them;
Let those also who love your name
Be joyful in You.
12 For You, O Lord, will bless
the righteous;
With favor You will surround him
as with a shield.

(Scripture from the New King James Bible, ©1980 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.)

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read Psalm 5.

Listen to the psalm ~ First impressions

What is the *tone* of Psalm 5? What stands out to you from your initial reading?

Put a psalm in your heart ~ (Memory verse) **Psalm 5:11**

(Write out the verse in the spaces below. Practice it each time you open your lesson.)

But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; let those also who love Your name be joyful in You.

Learn the lessons of the psalm ~

Selah (Think about):

How do you respond when someone hurts you or when persistent pain is present in your life? When there was no immediate answer for David, he rose to face a new day by first acknowledging God.

I. God uses the one who calls upon Him. vv. 1–3

David begins by sighing, crying and seeking God in earnest expectation that He will answer.

1. Use David's own words to describe his plea to God in verses 1–3.
 - a. v. 1
 - b. v. 2
 - c. v. 3

2. What does David's careful use of his words reveal to you about his heart? What does it tell you about his recognition of God's authority?

The word "direct" in verse 3 means *to set in order* your prayer. It is used in Genesis 22:9 to speak of Abraham *putting in order* the wood upon the altar where he would place his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God. It refers to taking deliberate thought about approaching God—understanding who He is. It is also the same Hebrew word used in Ecclesiastes 5:1–2, which states: *Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear. . . Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few.*

II. Prevailing prayer expects an answer. vv. 4–8

The man or woman God uses has a right heart with Him and a reverence for Him. David realized God’s holiness and shared His view of sin.

1. What does David say about God’s character? v. 4

2. Because God is holy, who will not stand in His presence? v.5
 - a. Who does God “hate”? (This simply means that God will reject those who reject Him.)

 - b. With great boldness, who does David declare God will deal with and why? v. 6

Pause & ponder ~

Our holy God will ultimately judge all sinners. According to Proverbs 6:16–19, what are the seven things God hates? Personal: Do you see any of these present in *your* life?

Conversely, sinners will be welcomed and find acceptance with God if they turn from their sinful ways and turn to Him.

3. On what basis does David approach God’s presence? v. 7
 - a. What is David’s desire that also inspires his worship? v. 8

 - b. Remember, David’s prayer in this psalm is one of seeking God’s guidance and knowing His will. Look again at the pattern of his prayer; how do you see him formulating a prayer that will ensure God’s answer?

III. *Guidance for the day* . . . vv. 8–12

In view of David's clear and present danger from his enemies, his prayer turns to a more urgent plea for God to judge those who oppose him.

1. How does David describe them in verse 9?

His reference to "their throat" as an "open tomb" speaks of their speech as an attempt to flatter but the intent was evil; and for this, David calls on God to hold them guilty.

2. Who, ultimately, was their rebellion against? v. 10

The psalm ends on a positive note of rejoicing; blessing God for His faithfulness.

3. David has every reason to praise God, encouraging others to do likewise. What does he inspire God's people to do? v. 11

- a. Why should God's children continue to rejoice through their trials? v. 12 What does this mean to you personally?

Touchpoint~

Notice David's prayer request is to be *led*, not delivered. God doesn't always deliver us *out* of our circumstances; sometimes He delivers us *in* them! God always has a straight way through our difficulties. Look up the following references and note what it says about God's path and your steps along the way.

- a. Proverbs 16:9

- b. Psalm 37:23

- c. Psalm 40:1–2

- d. 1 Peter 2:21–23

Live the psalm ~

The psalm ends (v.12) with the Lord's name manifesting His *favor* as protection around His people in the form of a shield. Think about the possible implications and blessings that are yours as a result. How can you apply God's favor and protection to your life in the coming week?

Pray the psalm ~

If you're unsure about the path ahead, take a moment to consider David's words in verse 8. Use them to formulate your prayer today: *Lead me, O Lord, in Your righteousness because of my enemies; make Your way straight before my face.*

*O You who hear prayer,
To You all flesh will come.*

Psalm 65:2

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 20: Psalm 145

The Guardian of Our Steps

Stay on the Path ~

Psalm 145 is ascribed to David and is the last composition in the Psalter that bears his name. In it he reveals the profound personal discoveries he made on the path about God's mercy and grace in the midst of his own trials and sin. The overpowering message is that our omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent Creator God holds these frail, finite human creatures in the grip of His indefatigable grace at all times! It is a stunning revelation that is incomprehensible this side of heaven. No one can understand the depth, breadth, width, and height of God's love; we can merely wrap ourselves in it and embrace it while we have breath in our lungs.

The Christian life becomes real to us when all we say and sing about in praise of Him becomes personal in relation to our need. As we encounter the bumps of life, we discover He was there all the time, those everlasting arms supporting us and holding us steady. We will spend forever praising God, whose righteousness is unsearchable; yet only those of us who acknowledge that we fail and fall at times can even begin to appreciate His good news of salvation and sanctification.

From one generation to another, as God's acts are told, each transformed life serves as a living witness to His power. David touches a nerve deep in the human soul through this psalm. It stands as a testimony to the greatness, goodness, and glory that is due God's name both here in this life and for all eternity to come.

Did you know ~

David authored more psalms than any other Old Testament writer—75 of the 150 that were composed are attributed to him. Known for being "the sweet singer of Israel," David's songs were first sung for an audience of One—out in the sheepfold while tending his father's flocks. There this talented musician and poet communed with God, honing his skill for playing on the harp which would later serve him well in the courts of King Saul. His reverence for God made him a man after God's own heart. The heading above Psalm 145 reads "a psalm of praise," the only psalm with this unique designation. While all of David's psalms were sung in praise to God, clearly this one stands apart as the clarion call to worship.

Psalm 145

A Song of God's Majesty and Love
A Praise of David.

1 I will extol You, my God, O King;
And I will bless Your name forever
and ever.

2 Every day I will bless You,
And I will praise Your name forever
and ever.

3 Great is the Lord, and greatly to
be praised;
And His greatness is unsearchable.

4 One generation shall praise Your
works to another,
And shall declare Your mighty acts.

5 I will meditate on the glorious
splendor of Your majesty,
And on Your wondrous works.

6 Men shall speak of the might of Your
awesome acts,
And I will declare Your greatness.

7 They shall utter the memory of Your
great goodness,
And shall sing of Your righteousness.

8 The Lord is gracious and full of
compassion,
Slow to anger and great in mercy.

9 The Lord is good to all,
And His tender mercies are over
all His works.

10 All Your works shall praise You,
O Lord,
And Your saints shall bless You.

11 They shall speak of the glory of
Your kingdom,
And talk of Your power,

12 To make known to the sons of men
His mighty acts,
And the glorious majesty of
His kingdom.

13 Your kingdom is an everlasting
kingdom,
And Your dominion endures
throughout all generations.

14 The Lord upholds all who fall,
And raises up all who are
bowed down.

15 The eyes of all look expectantly
to You,
And You give them their food
in due season.

16 You open Your hand
And satisfy the desire of every
living thing.

17 The Lord is righteous in all His ways,
Gracious in all His works.

18 The Lord is near to all who call
upon Him,
To all who call upon Him in truth.

19 He will fulfill the desire of those
who fear Him;
He also will hear their cry and
save them.

20 The Lord preserves all who love Him,
But all the wicked He will destroy.

21 My mouth shall speak the praise of
the Lord,
And all flesh shall bless His
holy name
Forever and ever.

(Scripture from the New King James Bible, ©1980 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.)

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read Psalm 145.

Listen to the psalm ~ First impressions

What is the *tone* of Psalm 145? What stands out to you from your initial reading?

2. Even though David was king over Israel, he declares God to be his King. His choice of the words, “I will praise” literally means “to bend the knee” and “to give a blessing.” His praise of God’s name was not for a moment; what does David say about it? v. 2

Pause & ponder ~

Praise and worship are meant to be a lifestyle for the believer—every day and on every occasion, merely because He is great and greatly to be praised (v. 3). What does this verse say specifically about God’s greatness? What does this mean to you?

As part of their contribution to praising God, each generation will tell about what God has done, both historically and personally as a testament to Him.

3. Upon what does David meditate? vv. 5–6

- a. What will this prompt him to do?

- b. What will be on everyone’s tongue? v. 7

II. We praise God for His righteous character. vv. 8–13

The psalmist extolled the Lord for His goodness and greatness in creation. Next the song of praise transitions from what God has done to who/what God is. With a sense of awe, David shares from the perspective of his own life experience.

1. David proclaims what about God’s character in the following?

- a. v. 8: _____

- b. v. 9: _____

How was David able to know of God’s love? The failures of his own life had taught him that “The Lord upholds all who fall, and raises up all who are bowed down” (v.14). The word *upholds* in Hebrew is descriptive of the Lord’s name: *Yahweh [the Lord] upholds*. He supports us when we fall down in life. He also raises up those who are *bowed down*. The picture is that of a reed bent by the strong blast of a windstorm or the intense heat of the sun.

2. Remember: You *fall down* because of your own choices in life; but you are *bowed down* by what life hands to you. Which is true of you today? Why? In either case, the Lord is there to uphold you because He is righteous—reason enough to praise Him!

3. Using verses 10-13 as your reference point, what does David say about the following:

- a. God’s works:

- b. God’s saints:

- c. God’s kingdom:

Touchpoint~

How are *you* able to know that God is full of compassion, slow to anger, and great in mercy? Because you have fallen—who hasn’t? And when you fail, He forgives. If you had never fallen or failed in life, you would never be able to know of the absolute reliability of God’s grace and mercy. He is always there to restore you. It is not the wrath or judgment of God that leads you to repentance—rather it is His goodness (Romans 2:4). Share a recent time when God’s goodness led you to experience His gift of repentance.

III. We praise God for His providential care. vv. 15–21

The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth (v.18). Looking at this verse closely, we see that it covers the necessities and desires we have from day to day. He upholds those who fall down; He raises up all who carry the heavy weight of daily burdens.

1. As the eyes of all look expectantly to Him, what does He generously supply?
 - a. v. 15:

 - b. v. 16:

The Lord answers the prayers of those who love Him and fear Him when they call to Him. He opens His hands to meet our needs when we open our hearts to express those needs to Him.

Pause & ponder ~

If you fear (revere) Him (v.19), God will fulfill your desire—what is your desire today?

God is listening—from what/whom do you need to be saved?

Do you love Him? If so, He promises (v. 20) to preserve your going out and your coming in. He is the Guardian of each and every step you take. When was the last time you praised Him for that?

2. Personal: Do you desire to know the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? If so, would you bow your heart right now and pray the following . . .

Lord, I see in Your wonderful Word that it's possible to experience a walk with You that brings forgiveness, joy, and satisfaction in abundance, and I want that with all my heart. I invite You now to come inside; forgive me of my sin; wash me in the shed blood of Christ; fill me with Your Holy Spirit. I want to live my life to please You and I praise You right now with my whole heart. In Jesus' precious name, amen!

If you prayed that prayer to invite Jesus Christ to come into your heart, tell someone about it: your group leader, counselor, or pastor. Note the date in your Bible, and welcome to the family of God!

Live the psalm ~

What David declared in Psalm 145 about praising God should be *your* daily, personal experience. God is unsearchable, indescribable, and incomprehensible—He is praiseworthy! In your own words, what is it about Him that produces in you a sense of awe and wonder today?

Pray the psalm ~

By far, your most painful failures are centered around your relationship with the Lord. You may say you love Him with your lips but then deny Him by your disobedience. If prayer has become a duty and serving an obligation, then God is not as near as He wants to be. Lift up your voice and call upon Him in truth right now. He is near and He wants to hear from you. Close your study with a time of praise.

Praise is the rehearsal of our eternal song.
Charles H. Spurgeon

Love in Action

1 John 1: Walking in Love

Lesson 1

1 John 1:1–10

Book Profile ~

The letter of 1 John is widely recognized as authored by the apostle John to the Christians in Asia Minor, also known as modern Turkey. It was written around A.D. 85–90 to readers who knew John well. The purpose of the letter was to refute the efforts being made by false teachers to challenge church doctrine by combining the gospel message with prevailing philosophies of the day. In it, John reiterates the main truths of the gospel message and warns against heresies leading some to compromise. The emphasis of the letter is God's love and the Christian's need to love others. It is written in simple terms that feature sharp contrasts: light and darkness, truth and error, God and Satan, life and death, love and hate.

Author Profile ~

John was an eyewitness to Jesus' earthly ministry and among the first called to follow Him. He was the last surviving apostle and one of the three who, along with his brother James and Peter, made up the Lord's inner circle. John referred to himself in his writings as the "disciple whom Jesus loved." He stood by Jesus at the crucifixion, being singled out by Him to care for His mother. John raced Peter to the empty tomb early on Resurrection morning and later walked with the risen Lord along the shore of Galilee. He is known as the "Apostle of Love" because love is the prominent theme in his writings. After writing his gospel account and the three letters from Ephesus, John was exiled to the island of Patmos and there wrote the Book of Revelation. He later returned to Ephesus where he lived out his final days until his death, approximately A.D. 100.

In a nutshell ~

John's personal testimony to his eyewitness account of the earthly life and ministry of Jesus was to affirm believers in the reality of their faith. He hoped that they might enter into the same kind of true fellowship he enjoyed with God.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read 1 John 1:1–10.

John was the oldest living apostle and Jesus' closest earthly friend, which meant that he was able to literally touch, see, and hear for himself the very embodiment of life—eternal life. Why would it be important for John to begin his letter with these words? Because his readers were listening to false teachers declaring that Jesus' humanity was not real. Some believed all existing matter was sinful and the body evil (Gnosticism); while others believed Jesus was merely an angel. John countered these false accusations by reminding believers that he had firsthand experience with Jesus. Throughout the remainder of his letter, he will continue to reveal his personal observations about the Lord.

“That which was from the beginning . . .” (v.1). The relative phrase “that which” encompasses every aspect about the *Word of Life* that the apostles knew and experienced. This *Word of Life* describes the Son as the visible expression of the invisible God.

1. Compare vv. 1–2 here with John's gospel in John 1:1–2. What similarities do you see?

2. How does John affirm here in vv. 1–2 what he earlier stated in John 1:14?

The reference to Jesus as the *Word of Life* is the Greek term *Logos*, signifying the very beginning.

3. How is Jesus Christ—the *Logos*—the agent that reveals God to humanity? See Genesis 1:1, Colossians 1:15–17, and Hebrews 1:2–3a to form your answer.

“This one who is life from God was shown to us, and we have seen him . . . he is the one who is eternal life” (1 John 1:2 NIV). The Greek word for life is *zoe*, referring to the life of the spirit and the soul. It is expressive of the highest and best of all that Christ is, that which He imparts to all believers: *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”* (John 14:6).

4. John says that the One who is life from God was manifested or revealed to us. What purpose did Jesus' life accomplish for us through His earthly ministry? See 1 John 3:5 and 8.
 - a. What will take place the next time He is revealed? Colossians 3:4 and 1 Peter 5:4

The fellowship between the Father and the Son has its origins in eternity. This fellowship was manifested in terms of *time* through the Incarnation—to the apostles and then to every believer. Everyone that enters this fellowship by believing in Christ is sealed with the Holy Spirit, becoming part of God's Family.

5. Read vv. 3–4 again closely. What two positive reasons does John give for writing?

John's desire is that all believers would enjoy the same kind of fellowship he enjoyed. The word used here for fellowship is *koinonia*, signifying a sharing together or having all things in common.

- a. John declares the foundation of our fellowship to be based in Christ. Who called us into this fellowship? See 1 Corinthians 1:9.

John is reaffirming the faith of his readers that was being challenged by false teachers. Christians who are in doubt as to the assurance of their salvation will be limited in their *fellowship* with the Father and Son as well as other believers. (We'll be exploring this in-depth throughout our study of 1 John.)

Selah ~

Looking from *your* perspective, share why fellowship is both a *privilege* and a *responsibility*.

The way believers treat one another tells the world something about God. Some people prefer to isolate themselves, believing they can live for God alone. The fact is, God created us for fellowship. He desires that we love and care for our believing brothers and sisters by *sharing* in one another's lives. He takes the matter of fellowship very seriously and so should we!

6. Personal: How much time and effort are *you* investing in the family of God? Give an example.

Key Verse ~ (Memory verse) **1 John 1:9**

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Review this verse often throughout the week. Write it out a couple of times in the space provided to help you commit it to memory. By week’s end, try to notice *how* and *where* you are able to put it into practice. Note your results.

Fellowship with God and One Another

Read 1 John 1:5–10 for review.

John’s letter is filled with references to fellowship. The biblical concept of fellowship involves more than a conversation at church or the sharing of a meal together. The Bible speaks of it as a spiritual oneness, a deep sharing of life’s concerns. It is a partnering together for a common cause. This kind of genuine fellowship—*koinonia*—can only be based upon maintaining a right heart before God.

1. What message does John convey about God in verse 5?

Up close ~

Since God is light, He is perfect and holy. He is the only one who can lead people out of the darkness of sin. In order to more fully appreciate what God has done in granting us fellowship with Him, let’s take a closer look at the contrast between darkness and light in Scripture. Look up the verses below and in a word or two note what you glean. Think carefully during this exercise about what happens to a believer during the process of turning from darkness to light.

- a. Acts 26:18
- b. Romans 13:12–14
- c. 2 Corinthians 4:4 and 6

d. Ephesians 6:12; and 5:8–11

e. 1 John 2:8–10

2. Several places in John's Gospel, Jesus speaks of being the *Light of the world*. Read John 8:12; 9:5; 12:35–36 and 46.

a. What do you learn about the power of light from these verses?

b. What does Jesus declare about those who believe in Him?

c. Summarize the affects of the Light of Truth upon *your own* life.

Jesus promised that whoever follows Him will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life. Light then is an illustration to us of truth, knowledge, and righteousness; while darkness is a picture of falsehood, ignorance, and unrighteousness or sin. Those who claim to follow the Son cannot live in spiritual darkness; they must live in the light of God's presence, continually illuminated by the truth: *"If we say we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth"* (1 John 1:6).

3. Personal: Here's your personal self-help list. Look at it to help you determine how far you've come in your own process. Briefly share your thoughts.

- Are you in close daily communion with God?
- Do you have a no-tolerance policy for any hypocrisy or sin?
- Is it easy for you to be transparent before the Lord or do you make attempts to conceal things from Him?
- How are you diligently working toward Christ-likeness?

Those who walk in the light will occasionally still find that they are sinning. Christians will not reach perfection until Jesus Christ returns and brings us home to be with Him. Our desire to walk in the light will help us to take advantage of the provision God has made for forgiveness through the shed blood of His Son.

4. What does John say about the person who claims to be sinless? v. 8

John was taking direct aim at the claims of the false teachers (1:6 and 1:10) who stated that it was possible for people to be without sin. In making this claim they were, in effect, saying that they did not need the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross. John's point is that they are only fooling themselves; they are liars and God's Word is not in them!

5. Christians need to be constantly reminded of a few facts. Look up the following references and finish the thought begun for you . . .

a. *Sin has no power over Christians*—Romans 6:6–7

b. *Believers have a new power to say 'no' to temptation*—1 Corinthians 10:13

c. *Christians have the power to say 'yes' to righteous living*—Romans 6:11–14

As God's children, we are not to deny sin, but rather to *confess* it. God has graciously provided the answer to our dilemma: "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (v. 9).

Up close ~

Use verse 9 as a word exercise to explore the breadth and depth of this week's memory verse. Using the resources you have on hand, define each of the following words:

a. *Confess*—

b. *Sins*—

c. *Faithful*—

d. *Just*—

e. *Forgive*—

f. *Cleanse*—

g. *Unrighteousness*—

Some people may be inclined to question that if Christ has forgiven all of their sins, then why do they need to continue confessing? Remember that John is speaking here about our *fellowship*—not our *relationship*—with the Father. The moment a person repents and believes in the name of Jesus Christ as their Savior, they become God’s child, forever adopted into His family. There is nothing they could do no matter how extreme that would cause Him to “un-adopt” that individual. However, a disobedient child cannot expect to have close intimate fellowship with God the Father.

To *confess* our sin means to *agree with God* about it and to acknowledge the wrong to Him, determining not to let it happen again. By refusing to admit that sin exists, we call Him a liar and cheat ourselves out of the possibility of fellowship with Him. Confession is also necessary to ensure continued fellowship with others in the body of Christ.

Remember that the moment a person becomes a believer, he or she is unconditionally saved from the condemnation of sin and conditionally saved from the power of sin. This means that the VICTORY you have over sin’s daily lure is *conditional*—there is something *you* must do. It is conditional in direct proportion to your *obedience* to Christ and your willingness to *confess*—agree with God—whenever you miss the mark! How wonderful to have the absolute scriptural assurance that whenever you confess—He is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse. Hallelujah and Amen!

6. Personal: What have *you* learned so far about confession that will help you maintain a close walk with God?

Notes

Love in Action

1 John 2: Abiding in Love

Lesson 2

1 John 2:1–29

In a nutshell ~

The opening verses of 1 John 2 are the conclusion to John's statements in chapter 1 about fellowship with God and one another. Previously, we learned that it is through Jesus Christ that we have salvation and fellowship with God. We're also learning that walking in the light with Him enables us not to sin; when we do sin, we have an Advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the Righteous—who intercedes on our behalf. Maintaining a right heart before Him qualifies us for true fellowship with the brethren.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read 1 John 2:1–29.

After focusing much of his attention on refuting the false teachers, John now turns to warmly address the Christians. At the time of this writing, John was nearing one hundred years of age. This elder father of the faith had spent nearly all his life in ministry, becoming revered by all those he considered his spiritual children.

His transition to addressing the believers begins in verse one with the words, "*My little children,*" meaning *my born ones*. It was a term of loving affection used by a teacher to address his disciples.

Up close ~

There are 7 instances in the Book of 1 John where he uses the words "*My little children.*" In several instances, John uses these words to convey his love as he prefaces a hard word to the believers. Look up each reference containing the words "*my little children*" in John's epistle and note the important message he wanted to convey to the church.

a. 2:1

b. 2:12

c. 2:28

d. 3:7

e. 3:18

f. 4:4

g. 5:21

We're discovering that the beginning point of fellowship with God and other Christians is the understanding that we need to walk in the light rather than in the darkness. As God's children, when we choose to sin and we confess it, God is willing to forgive. We *need not* sin but, when we do, we have an Advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ His Son.

1. What qualifies Jesus to be our Advocate? v. 2

John is attempting to correct the perception in the minds of his readers who claim to know God but make no effort to obey Him. "*Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation*" (Hebrews 9:28).

2. How can a person be certain whether or not they're a believer? v. 3

a. What about the person who professes to know Christ but doesn't obey Him—is it possible for that one to belong to the family of God? v. 4

It is only by taking God's commands seriously and keeping them that we can have absolute assurance we know and belong to Him.

3. What is the litmus test of a person's obedience to God? v. 5

The word *perfected* (v. 5) does not refer to a state of perfection as we understand it, but is better translated as *made complete* or *become mature*. In verse 6, John states that the person who says he abides in Christ ought also to walk *as He walked*. In other words, if we're going to wear the title "Christian," we must do more than just *talk the talk*; we must also be willing to *walk the walk*.

Selah ~

What has John taught us so far? As a recap, go back and examine the 5 “If we” statements in your reading of 1 John. Summarize John’s point in each one below.

- a. “If we say. . .” (1:6, 8,10)

- b. “If we walk. . .” (1:7)

- c. “If we sin. . .” (2:1)

- d. “If we confess. . .” (1:9)

- e. “If we keep. . .” (2:3–5)

- f. Personal: Your life’s behavior tells the world what *you* believe. Think about it . . . are you more at ease to *talk the talk* or do you welcome the challenge to *walk the walk*? Please explain.

- g. What in your study this week has convinced you that you do indeed belong to God?

Key Verse ~ (Memory verse) **1 John 2:5**

“But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.”

Review this verse often throughout the week. Write it out a couple of times in the space provided to help you commit it to memory. By week’s end, try to notice *how* and *where* you are able to put it into practice. Note your results.

The Test of Knowing Him

Read 1 John 2:7–29 for review.

John had just finished telling his readers that they should walk as Jesus walked—by obeying God. John will now reveal a second way to discern a true believer—whether or not they love as Jesus loved. John states clearly that those who claim to walk in the light while hating their believing brother or sister are really walking in the darkness. The key to walking in the light is: LOVE! Unless believers learn to love one another, they will not be able to grow spiritually.

For the Jews, the command to love others is an old one, dating all the way back to God's covenant with the nation of Israel, when He set them apart as His chosen people. The new commandment was given by Jesus so that the world would be able to tell His people apart from others.

1. How was the old commandment stated in Leviticus 19:18b?
 - a. Restate the way Jesus issued the new commandment in John 13:34–35. Those who followed His command were considered what?

John knew he wasn't writing a new commandment (v.7), as the command to love one another was the same message that was heard all the way back to the Old Testament. What made it new was that Jesus interpreted it in a new way. Those who believed in Jesus had *their hearts changed* by His love. He became the motivating factor for Christians to love one another. The Indwelling Holy Spirit makes it a reality!

2. In whom is the truth of this command made visible? v. 8
 - a. Personal: Are you able to see yourself loving others the way Christ loves you?

In the remainder of the chapter, John continues to highlight the contrasts of light and darkness, love and hate, God and the world.

3. What does John say about the person who claims to be in the light, while at the same time hating their brother or sister? v. 9
 - a. In contrast to verse 9, what act reveals true faith? What benefit results? v. 10

- b. What does John say keeps a person from loving others? v. 11

Selah ~

Think for a moment about what it is like to turn off the light switch and walk around in a dark room. What does it do to your overall perspective and sense of direction? Are you more prone to trip and fall or perhaps cause someone else to? Now take it a step further and apply this same lesson spiritually. What would happen to your spiritual perspective and sense of direction if you were to deliberately cut yourself off from the light of truth? What affect would the darkness potentially have over you? Please explain your thoughts.

John was most likely referring here to the false teachers and their followers who were rejecting the Christians leaving their assembly. But what happens if you find yourself seriously disliking another believer who fellowships in the same church as you every Sunday? Does it mean that you are not a true believer after all? No! John's words are not referring to disliking a Christian brother or sister in the faith who may be disagreeable. There will always be a few people in the church who are not to our liking. Rather, he is referring to those who respond to the unlikable and disagreeable by ignoring or ostracizing them—perhaps even turning their backs on them as if they were enemies—that isn't how God's loves works. God's love working in and through us is not something *we feel emotionally* but a *choice we make deliberately to love as Jesus loved*. If our heart is right with Him, He enables us to love the unlovable. After all, each one of us was at one time or another in that same category with Him!

Verses 12–14 are difficult to understand. In them John addresses three different groups of readers: little children, fathers, and young men. There is disagreement as to whether these divisions represent chronological age or degrees of spiritual maturity. Some Bible scholars believe that the three terms refer to all the readers, and that whatever is attributed to each category is intended for all—since they had all experienced salvation, spiritual warfare, and close fellowship with God. Based on John's previous use of the term *little children*, it is most likely that he was referring to everyone in the church. The distinction, then, would be to use the three terms for emphasis.

4. Finish the statements below as to why John wrote to each group (vv.12–14). Take it a step further and consider the questions that follow each statement to better help you understand what John is saying to each one.

He wrote to little children because . . .

- What basic fact would *little children* comprehend about their faith?

He wrote to fathers because . . .

- What greater wisdom would *fathers* possess because they had a mature relationship with God?

He wrote to young men because . . .

- What quality would *young men* possess that would enable them to be victorious over their enemy?
- Verse 14 reveals the *key* to remaining strong and living victoriously—what is it?

John is attempting to reassure Christians of their salvation and growth in Christ. Next he will warn them about the dangers of loving the world and listening to false teaching. He tells them that not only are believers to love God and fellow believers, he also tells them what they are not to love—the world. John is not referring here to God's creation—that which reveals His glory and which He declared as good. He is also not referring to the fact that God so loved the world that He gave His Son to die for it (John 3:16). The term for *world* John uses here actually refers to the realm of Satan's influence—those who are under his authority and who hate God as a result.

5. Is it possible to love the world and love God at the same time? v.15 (See James 4:4 for further insight into why this is so.)

- a. Verse 16 is a summation of all sin that is present in the world. Name the three categories into which every sin known to mankind falls.

Once again, John makes a sharp contrast: God and the world are such opposites that it is impossible to love both at the same time—they are mutually exclusive. But since believers cannot remove themselves from the world, we must understand that we live in the middle of a war zone. There will always be an ongoing battle on earth between the forces of God and the forces of Satan. One day Satan's kingdom will be destroyed and his rule will come to an end. In the meantime, our mission as believers is to learn to be *in the world but not of the world!*

- b. What is happening to this present world? v. 17 What about the one who does the will of God? What does John mean by this?

The world's values, which seem so appealing, are in direct opposition to God. As believers, when we love the world, we are turning away from God's love to a *substitute*, and the world is full of substitutes! Anything in our lives that keeps us from enjoying God's love and doing His will is of the world and not of God. It is foolish to hold tightly to something that is passing away. God's missionary Jim Elliot once said: "*He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.*" Remember that isolation from God's people (even the difficult ones) makes it very easy for believers to become worldly. We need each other—we belong to each other—we depend on each other to live in this world and to enjoy the next!

In the remaining verses of chapter 2, John warns about the coming of the Antichrist, and that many antichrists are already here; meaning the last hour before the Lord's return has already begun.

6. What is the evidence that proves this? v. 19

a. What does John have to say about the spirit of antichrist? vv. 22–23

7. John states in verses 20–21 that every believer has an anointing from the Holy Spirit. What does this anointing ensure?

a. Every believer can be confident of this anointing—why? v. 27 What is the promise here for *you*?

John writes (v. 26) to warn all believers about those who will try to deceive them. But what are the promises for the believers who continue to *abide in Him*?

b. vv. 24–25

8. What last piece of advice does John give in this chapter to encourage his readers? vv. 28–29 What does this mean to you personally?

Selah ~

Abiding—remaining in Him—results in eternal life and the assurance now that *you* may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming! Doing the right thing does not *make* you a Christian—it only proves that you are one!

Notes

Love in Action

1 John 3: Obeying in Love

Lesson 3

1 John 3:1–24

In a nutshell ~

When was the last time that you remember pausing to think about God's great love for you? John is filled with wonder as he contemplates the love of God in making us His children. At the time this epistle was written, the church was being influenced by false teachers (Gnostics) who believed they could sin without consequence and their spirits remain untainted by evil. They claimed to know God but they hated their fellow believers who did not agree with them. John wrote to refute their openly sinful lifestyle and to assure all true believers that they must practice what is right if they claim to be Christian.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read 1 John 3:1–24.

The Greek word for *children* is a reference to spiritual birth. John is calling attention to the fact that God has *given birth* to believers—they are His own children. To be called *children of God* is not merely to assume a title; it is rather an absolute fact of life. In this chapter, John wants all believers to have confident assurance of their position in God's family.

1. Think about it: What does it mean to *you* to be a child of God?
 - a. How did you come to be His child? See John 1:9–12; John 3:3; and 1 Peter 1:23.
 - b. How does the “world” feel about the child of God? v. 1
2. The word “know” in vv.1–2 speaks of *acceptance*. John makes a similar statement about Jesus in John 1:10–11. What is his point?

The failure to recognize Jesus was due to the fact that people didn't accept Him for all that He is. Since the world rejects God, should we really be surprised when it also rejects us—His offspring?

3. As His child, what is God's ultimate goal for you? v. 2

a. How should this revelation affect your life while here on earth?

Do you have the hope John is talking about in his letter? Then for you, Christian, Heaven is not just a destination, it is a motivation to become *as Jesus is!* Since you enjoy the privilege of the family relationship with God, you must also bear the responsibility of exhibiting the character of God in your everyday life. The word *hope* (v. 3) means the confident expectation of future blessings. Since you have the hope of one day seeing Christ and becoming like Him, you must also desire to purify yourself from the presence of all sin in your life.

4. Look up the word *purify* (v. 3) and write a practical definition based upon its application to your life.

John uses the present tense in speaking of Jesus: "*He is pure*" (v. 3); "*He is righteous*" (v. 7). He remains these things today because He is eternal and He is opposed to sin and its devastating effect upon His children.

Selah ~

The believer's position is that of a child of God—nothing less—period! But as His child, do you fully realize the meaning behind that great truth? The Apostle Paul stated that the moment we accept Jesus Christ as Savior, the veil of unbelief that previously blinded our hearts to the truth is lifted and taken away and we see Him for who He is (2 Corinthians 3:14–18). Paul also says that the process of transformation here on earth is a slow one and we will only fully comprehend once we reach Heaven. Take a moment to consider the following from your perspective . . .

a. Briefly relate when and how you met Jesus Christ for the very first time.

b. Since then, are you surprised when the "world" does not accept you for being a Christian?

- c. As Jesus continues to reveal Himself to you through His Word, do you continue to see more of Him manifested in your daily life? Give an example.

- d. Be encouraged Christian! John states that one day **you will be like Jesus!** Right now, as the Holy Spirit works in and through your life, would you say that you are working *with God* or *resisting Him*?

Key Verse ~ (Memory verse) **1 John 3:18**

“My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”

Review this verse often throughout the week. Write it out a couple of times in the space provided to help you commit it to memory. By week’s end, try to notice *how* and *where* you are able to put it into practice. Note your results.

Verses 4–10 are a challenge for the believer to interpret and make application in daily life. The Bible does not give one overall definition for sin, but here it states that *sin is lawlessness*. Scripture tells us that lawlessness is characteristic of the spirit of Antichrist: *“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and then man of lawlessness [sin] is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God . . .”* (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).

- 5. Look up the following references that represent the various facets of sin and briefly note what you learn . . .
 - a. Proverbs 4:19

 - b. Romans 14:23b

 - c. James 4:17

d. 1 John 5:17a

The “man of lawlessness” does not reign in the believer’s life, but each child of God must deal with known sin the same way God dealt with it—by putting it to death!

Up close ~

Finish the sentences contained in the chart below to get a bigger picture of sin.

v. 4: *Whoever commits sin*

v. 4: *And sin is*

v. 5: *Christ was manifested*

v. 6: *The conclusion is*

v. 8: *He that commits sin*

v. 8: *The origin of sin is*

v. 8: *The Son of God was manifested*

v. 9: *The conclusion is*

John asserts (v. 9) that those who have been born into God’s family do not sin because God’s life (seed) is in them. They cannot keep on sinning because they have been born of God. John’s intent is to convey that the believer can no longer choose to *habitually*, or *continually* live in sin—they do not make a practice of it. They do not desire to live in that way; in fact, they renounce it because it is incompatible with their new nature in Christ. Sin is still active and, at times the believer will give in to it, but sin no longer has dominion or control, which is why the Christian is constantly fighting against it! In other words, your Christian walk is daily lived out on a spiritual battleground. The real question is: *who will win your heart today. . .tomorrow. . .next week?*

Jesus Christ’s death on the cross is the only thing that allowed God to forgive the sinner. It also provided the way for Christians to live without living in sin. He came literally to *destroy the works of the devil* (v. 8). The word “destroy” means to *diffuse*, or to *take the power out*. Satan is a defeated foe—meaning he can only have the victory if we let him! Remember that you as a Christian are fighting from the position of VICTORY—Jesus has already won! Will you take a moment to compose a prayer of thanks to Him?

When asked to lay one's life down for our brethren, we should be willing. The true test of being a Christian is our willingness to sacrifice on behalf of our brothers and sisters.

- b. Personal: Can you give a practical example of how you are expressing your love in action and in truth?

God knows that we love imperfectly and that we do not always rise to His standard. We may not be there for someone in need; we may not be willing to love that difficult individual in the body of Christ. We may even begin to listen to Satan's lies about us. If or when we do fall short, we have God's power and peace that keeps us secure in Him. And because He knows all things, He understands our desire to follow His example.

4. If your heart is right with God (1 John 1:9), what blessing is yours? v. 21

- a. With this confidence at hand, what can we do? v. 22 (See also John 15:12-16).

Warren Wiersbe says that conscience is the window of the heart that lets in God's truth. When we have confidence toward God, we also have freedom of speech in His presence, resulting in answered prayer and rest for our souls!

Up close ~

In verse 24, John speaks of the indwelling of Christ made possible by the Holy Spirit. John first heard Jesus speak of Him in the Upper Room Discourse (John 14). In these parting words, Jesus spoke of "another Comforter," the *Parakletos*—*One called alongside*. His Spirit makes it possible for us to know that He abides in us. What fact do you find about the Holy Spirit in John 14:17a, that is similar to John's words here in 3:1? Keep this in mind as you navigate through this temporal world with the Spirit's enabling.

Remember, if there is no sacrifice involved, it isn't Christian love. Ministry that costs nothing accomplishes nothing! Individual acts of sacrificial love have transforming power, so don't ever minimize what you do for another in the name of the Lord. Jesus told His disciples that even a cup of cold water given in His name carries with it a reward!

Notes

Love in Action

1 John 4: Believing in Love

Lesson 4

1 John 4:1–21

In a nutshell ~

The beloved Apostle John reminds his readers in chapter four of the critical importance of discerning between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error, a warning which still applies today. The world puts forth philosophies and beliefs that seem to make sense but when held up to the truth of God's Word, are shown to be what they are—wrong and dangerous. Christians must learn not to rely on the claims or credentials of other people, but to make it their aim to know God's Word well enough to be able to discern truth from error for themselves.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read 1 John 4:1–21.

Are you in the habit of testing every person you listen to and every message you hear to see if they line up with Scripture? Do your words and actions present an accurate picture of God to others around you? These are some of the issues we will deal with in our lesson this week, as we add to our understanding of what a mature, loving disciple of Christ looks like.

By the time John's letter was written, he was most likely the only remaining eyewitness to the person and work of Jesus in the world. A portion of the second and third generation believers had begun to doubt what they had been taught about Jesus. The influence of the false teachers was being felt. John makes the point that the responsibility for testing the spirits does not rest on church leaders or theologians, but each individual believer.

1. Why is it so important to try (question) every spirit and teaching we hear? v. 1
 - a. What is the most important "test" to apply? v. 2
 - b. What does John say in vv. 2–3 that reiterates his statements in 2:22–23?

2. What does John state about God's "children" in vv. 4–6?
 - a. What does he say in these same verses about the false teachers in the world?
 - b. Why do *you* think a false teacher would be well received by the world?

“ . . .By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (v. 6). We can closely inspect a person's lifestyle and the fruit of their ministry but the most important test must be *what is being taught about the person and work of Jesus Christ!* The ultimate truth test for whether or not a person is speaking for God is his (or her) belief about Jesus Christ. John's point is that every believer has the responsibility to call into question anyone who rejects the biblical representation of Christ.

Note: John's use of the pronoun *you* (v. 4), is plural and refers to the community of believers. The used of "them" and "they" are both references to false teachers. John implies here that while every believer must battle the enemy daily, we are not meant to do battle against him alone. There is a greater power available to us in numbers whenever "we" come together, locking our shields for prayer, protection and guidance.

Up close ~

The world turns a deaf ear to the things of God. Look up 1 Corinthians 2:12–14 to find out why and note the reason below.

The Spirit of God, however, enables the believer to do many things. Briefly note what He does for the believer according to the following:

- a. John 14:17
- b. John 14:26
- c. John 15:26–27
- d. John 16:13–15

Key Verse ~ (Memory verse) **1 John 4:17**

“Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world..”

Review this verse often throughout the week. Write it out a couple of times in the space provided to help you commit it to memory. By week’s end, try to notice *how* and *where* you are able to put it into practice. Note your results.

Earlier in his letter (1:5), John described God’s nature as light; here in v. 7, John describes Him as *love*. Genuine biblical love finds its true origin in God. It is in Him that believers discover the resource from which to draw the purity, holiness, and joy needed to love others. Unfortunately, we all too often neglect these valuable resources, trying to supplement them instead from the depths of our own imperfect hearts, causing ourselves and others great disappointment.

3. What is the proof of the Christian’s spiritual birth and relationship with God? v. 7
 - a. How does this love come into the world? v. 8
 - b. What does a person who does not love other Christians reveal about themselves? v. 8
 - c. What is the proof and purpose of God’s love for us? v. 9

4. Verse 10 provides the true definition of love. Finish the verse below by filling in *your own name* where space is provided. (Read it through again with this emphasis.)

“. . . This is love: not that _____ loved God, but that He loved _____ and sent His Son to be the propitiation for _____’s sins.”

Take a moment to pause and ponder the full meaning of what you just read. The essence of verse 10 reveals why God created you, why He cares, and why He allowed His Son to die on the cross for you. Briefly state what this means to you personally.

Selah ~

The phrase “*God is love*” appears so simple on the surface, but behind these words is the Master’s plan of the ages. To help add some clarity to the depth of God’s love, try the exercise below. Read the phrase and the corresponding verses in parenthesis; then pick out a key word that is significant to you. This is completely subjective and will vary in your group but be ready to share and support your answer.

Because God loves—He gave (4:9) My key word: _____

Because God loves—He died (4:10) My key word: _____

Because God loves—He completes (4:12) My key word: _____

Because God loves—He blesses (4:13, 18) My key word: _____

Being born into God’s family opens up the way for a mutual love relationship—both incoming and out-flowing! “*Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another*” (v. 11). As we continue taking on our Father’s likeness, we also allow His love to become the motive that compels us to love one another.

Evidently there were false teachers who had left the church, claiming to love God and yet at the same time hating God’s children. In verses 11–12 and 19–21, John reiterates that it is not possible to love God whom they had never seen and, at the same time, despise those belonging to Him. God was present on earth—visibly—in the life of His Son, Jesus Christ. Presently, the Holy Spirit is with God’s children on earth—*visibly*—in the lives of His children. There is evidence of His presence and power each time believers reach out in love.

5. When we do live by God’s love, what dual action takes place? v. 12
 - a. Look up the word *perfected* in several different translations and note your findings.

God never intended for His children to hoard His love for their own enjoyment; He intends for us to give it out and, as we do, His inexhaustible supply of *Agape`* is continually replenished as needed. When He abides in us and we demonstrate our love for one another, His love becomes *perfected—matured* in us. If you have ever wondered why Christians go through difficulties in life, part of the reason is because God wants to mature our love to the point that it becomes second nature to us. Love is not something for us to keep close—it must overflow to others in order to be effective!

- b. What reason does John give as to why we love God and others? v. 19
 - c. Personal: On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being best, how much are you visibly showing your love for God and others *by your actions*?

Trusting in His Love

Reread 1 John 4:13–18 for review.

Following the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the disciples experienced the fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Spirit, making it possible for them and every believer thereafter to know what it means to abide—to *live in God* and have *God live in them*. “*We know that we live in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit*” (v.13). The Holy Spirit is the gift who enables believers to trust in their relationship with God.

1. What other reason does John give for believers trusting in the message they have heard? v. 14

The “we” referred to here pertains to the apostles and other eyewitnesses of the Lord’s life on earth.

a. What is the test that proves a person’s belief genuine? And what is the evidence of that profession of faith? v. 15

In verse 16, the pronoun “we” refers not to the apostles, but to John and his readers. He says that believers have known by experience and therefore trust in the love of God.

2. As believers trust in that love daily, what understanding do they gain? v. 16b

a. Personal: Share one of the ways *you* personally experienced God’s love abiding in you this past week.

b. What kind of love is produced by this mutual indwelling love of God? v. 17

When we have boldness we do not fear. Love and fear cannot co-exist; one will automatically exclude the other. Since fear has to do with punishment and since Jesus Christ took the believer’s punishment upon Himself, any fear in the believer’s life has to do with a lack of confidence in God’s provision. Believers do not need to be afraid of the future or of impending judgment because God’s love has set them free to love Him and others openly. The future is your friend when Jesus is your Lord!

c. Personal: Have you come to terms with how much God loves you? Your love for Him will be reflected in your love for others. As you continue to let your love overflow, what great truth can you claim in Matthew 25:37–40?

Notes

Love in Action

1 John 5: Victorious in Love

Lesson 5

1 John 5:1–21

In a nutshell ~

If you were composing a letter to leave behind as a guide to help others know and understand what really matters, you would choose your words very carefully. Neatly tucked inside the closing chapter of John's epistle we find the words that were most important to him—those containing the key to abundance here and now as well as in the hereafter: *begotten, overcome, victory, eternal life, assurance, confidence, answered prayer and freedom*—all words that convey a sense of permanence. John's desire at the end of his life was to leave those who would follow after him a solid foundation on which to build and rest their faith in God.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read 1 John 5:1–21.

John has spelled out clearly how to recognize the characteristics that are the basis for determining whether or not someone is a true Christian.

1. Let's briefly recap by taking a look back at what the chapters in 1 John previously taught us about the birthmarks of a believer. Using the references below, finish the following: *Everyone who is born of God . . .*

a. 2:29 –

b. 3:9 –

c. 4:7 –

2. Here in chapter 5, John completes the picture, brushing on the finishing strokes by explaining how to be victorious in our Christian faith. From the verses below, how does John complete his thought pattern about *everyone who is born of God*?

a. 5:1 –

b. 5:4 –

c. 5:18 –

3. According to John's statements here in chapter 5, how do we know that we love God's children? v. 2

- a. What is the true test of a believer's love for God? v. 3
- b. Look up the definition of the word *burdensome*. What does John mean when he says that God's commandments are not burdensome? v. 3
- c. Look back to the statements made about this by Jesus in the Upper Room in John 14:15 and 21. What, again, is the promise for the one who obeys Him?

John, like Jesus, inseparably linked *love* together with *obedience*. John adds the emphasis that obedience to God is possible because His commands are not a burden to those that love Him.

Selah ~

Realizing that your love for God is directly equivalent to the degree of your obedience to Him, how much would you say that you love Him right now? Please share your thoughts.

4. Who does John say will win the battle against the world? vv. 4–5

- a. In John 16:33, what does John add that is key to our ability to overcome?

Though the ultimate battle has been won *in Christ*, daily each conflict must be lived out on the battlefield! The way to overcome and claim victory is by renewing your faith through the Holy Spirit's power indwelling you. Will you do it now and praise Him for making it possible for you to overcome?

Key Verse ~ (Memory verse) **1 John 5:13**

“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.”

Review this verse often throughout the week. Write it out a couple of times in the space provided to help you commit it to memory. By week’s end, try to notice *how* and *where* you are able to put it into practice. Note your results.

Blessed Assurance

Read 1 John 5:6–21 for review.

The Apostle John understood that a wrong interpretation of the truth would have lasting negative consequences for the believers. His goal was to help them learn to discern and live for that which is based upon truth. The singular thread that wove together John’s letter was the truth that eternal life is in Jesus Christ alone. *“This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth”* (v. 6).

1. Who are the three who bear witness to this in heaven? These three are one. v. 7
 - a. Who are the three who bear witness on earth? These three agree as one. v. 8

These verses have to do with three phases of Jesus’ life when He was manifested as the Son of God in Human form: at His baptism (*the water*), His death (*the blood*), and His resurrection (*the Spirit*). Each of these testified to the fact that the man Jesus was the divine Son of God.

John makes the point (v. 9) that because the people of his day believed human testimony when it was validated by two or three witnesses, then surely they could believe the three-fold witness of God, since He was behind all three. Together they testified that Jesus is the Christ.

Up close ~

In the Gospel of John, Jesus responded to those who questioned Him by indicating He had *five* very reliable witnesses; who or what were they in each of the following verses?

- a. John 5:31–32, and 37
- b. John 5:33–35
- c. John 5:36
- d. John 5:39

2. According to 1 John 5:10, what does John declare about the one who believes in the Son of God?

- a. What about those who do not believe?
- b. What truth does John make clear for everyone in verse 12?

The false teachers John wrote to the believers about did not believe *that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son*. This truth is not only a future hope, but also a present reality for every believer. We need not wait for it—we need not work for it; it is rather a gift from God that can be fully experienced NOW! Have you thanked Him lately for His priceless indescribable gift?

The last nine verses of John's wonderful letter are meant to be a summary of the text and an encouragement to all believers to apply what they have read and believed.

3. To whom does John write and for what purpose? v. 13

4. What is the sweet confidence that we as believers have in approaching God?
vv. 14–15

- a. If we are sure that He hears us, what are we promised?

Selah ~

The High Priest of the Old Testament was allowed once a year to enter the Holy of Holies on behalf of God's people. Our High Priest—Jesus Christ—tore down the veil separating God from man and is seated at the right hand of the Father, making intercession on our behalf. Read Hebrews 4:14–16 through as you think about prayer.

- a. How does God want you to approach Him in prayer?

- b. What do these verses tell you about your Lord? How would this enable Him to understand *your* petitions?

- c. Personal: Do *you* have the kind of confidence the writer of Hebrews talked about and that John writes about here in 5:14–15? (Please personalize it.)

Praying according to God's will is the key to receiving what we ask of Him. It is important to discuss the matter with Him and to know what the Scriptures say about His will. Most of God's will for our lives is already written on the pages of the Bible. By learning to use His Word to formulate our requests and praying the promises back to Him, we are praying in a way that honors Him, assuring us of our petitions.

Verses 16–17 present an example of the kind of prayer God will answer. Because believers are called to love, we are also called to pray! When we see a Christian brother or sister in sin, we should pray and, as the Lord leads, confront them about their sin. The question is in the difference between sinning in a way that leads to death and sinning in a way that does not. There are differing opinions as to what John's intended meaning is here; therefore, we must examine it in the context of the entire letter. John was writing to the believers to refute the false teachers who denied Jesus' deity and at the same time lived in habitual sin themselves. Since they were living in a continual state of rebellion against God, and at the same time denying who Jesus Christ was, their unrepentant attitude would keep them in a place that was beyond the reach of prayer. We are not called to judge others but to pray for them, and to pray in such a way that God would hear from heaven and answer! The prayer of a righteous person avails much (James 5:16).

5. What does the one born of God *do*—and *not do*? v. 18

The person who makes the deliberate choice *not* to continue in sin is safe—Jesus keeps that one safe. The enemy cannot take away his/her salvation; they are secure in God's grace!

John earlier wrote his Gospel in order that his readers would come to believe in Jesus Christ (John 20:31). He wrote this epistle so that believers might *know* and have assurance of their salvation. Although we may doubt and even falter due to lifestyle choices or our circumstances, John assures us all that we do not need to worry about our salvation! *“These things have I written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life”* (v. 13).

Up close ~

In addition to *knowing* we have eternal life, there are six other instances in chapter 5 where John uses the assuring words “we know.” Find all six and finish the statements (taken from the NKJV).

1. *We know that we love the children of God when* (v. 2) _____

2. *We know that if He hears us* (v. 15) _____

3. *We know that whoever is born of God* (v. 18) _____

4. *We know that we are of God* (v. 19) _____

5. *We know that the Son of God has come* (v. 20) _____

6. *We know Him who* (v. 20) _____

7. Personal: What have you learned through your study that has increased your confidence level in your walk with God? How has this changed your life?

In one final attempt to refute false teaching and rescue those who might be prone to receive it, John closes his letter with an affectionate plea: *“Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen”* (v. 21). It is his last word, his heartfelt entreaty to every believer: keep yourself from anything that would threaten to take God’s place in your heart—anything that vies for your attention and affection. Even aged believers can be tempted, as the old hymn says: *“Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.”* Our heartfelt prayer should be: *“Take my heart, Lord, take and seal it. Seal it for Thy courts above.”* Will you make the words of this old song your prayer today?

Notes