



PSALMS

A CRY IN THE NIGHT

STUDY GUIDE



PSALMS

a cry in the night

spring

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Welcome to our seven-week series on the Psalms.

Even as we bask in the glow of Eastertide—the 50 day season that follows Easter Sunday—we will still face struggles, challenges, and pain. Though the resurrection of Jesus changes everything, we await the full redemption of all of creation.

Creation is “groaning,” as the apostle Paul writes, and we see this everywhere from divisions between us and our neighbors, to our addiction to distractions, to the devastation of the natural world.

Who will hear our cry? Who will make all things new? Who will bring us peace in the darkest night?

These are ancient questions, as ancient as humanity itself. And Scripture offers us a beautiful, holy answer. Christ has died. Christ is risen. *Christ will come again.*

In the meantime, as we wait for this full redemption, Jesus invites us to cry out to him. Amid our fear, anguish, confusion, frustration, or powerlessness, Jesus comes to us with open ears and open arms.

The book of Psalms invites us to bring our full selves to God—our minds, our emotions, our bodies, our hopes, and our fears. This is why we are calling this study guide

a cry in the night

If you’ve ever been sleepless or afraid, anxious or uncertain, in pain or in need, this study is for you. We will dig into the ancient prayerbook of the Bible and find honest, raw, and hopeful prayers that can help guide us in our own.

No matter what you’re going through, God promises to be with you always.

On this journey with you, *Pastor Courtney*

PSALMS: A CRY IN THE NIGHT

Daily Bible Reading Plan

April 12 - May 24, 2026

Memory Verses: Psalms 23:1-6

Reading and Praying the Psalms

- We've organized this dive into the Psalms thematically, with the plan culminating where the Psalms always end up: declaring God's praise!

All videos and readings are available at mycom.com/dailybible and on the PCOM app under Spiritual Formation

Introductory Stuff:

- **Video: *How to Read the Bible: Poetry***
- **Video: *The Psalms: Introduction***
- **Reading: *The School of the Psalms*, Eugene Peterson**
- **Reading: *The Psalms as a Tool*, Eugene Peterson**

Week 1 - Psalms of Delight & Joy

- 4/12: Psalm 1:1-6
- 4/13: Psalm 16:1-11
- **Video: *Chara/Joy***
- 4/14: Psalm 30:1-12
- 4/15: Psalm 37:1-17
- 4/16: Psalm 37:18-40
- 4/17: Psalm 100:1-5
- 4/18: Psalm 147:1-20

Week 2 - Psalms of Fear & Anger

- 4/19: Psalm 5:1-12
- 4/20: Psalm 23:1-6
- **Guide: *What Does Psalm 23 Mean?***
- 4/21: Psalm 27:1-14
- **Guide: *Praying the Psalms in Times of Fear***
- 4/22: Psalm 34:1-22
- 4/23: Psalm 35:1-16
- 4/24: Psalm 35:17-28
- 4/25: Psalm 56:1-13

**Week 3 - Psalms of
Repentance & Forgiveness**

- 4/26: Psalm 6:1-10
- 4/27: Psalm 38:1-22
- 4/28: Psalm 51:1-19
- **Video: David**
- 4/29: Psalm 86:1-17
- 4/30: Psalm 103:1-22
- 5/1: Psalm 130:1-8
- 5/2: Psalm 143:1-12

**Week 5: Psalms Seeking
Wisdom**

- 5/10: Psalm 1:1-6 (again!)
- **Video: Psalm 1**
- 5/11: Psalm 49:1-20
- 5/12: Psalm 73:1-28
- 5/13: Psalm 119:1-16
- 5/14: Psalm 119:33-48
- 5/15: Psalm 119:97-112
- 5/16: Psalm 119:129-144

**Week 4: Psalms of Hope
& Confidence**

- 5/3: Psalm 33:1-22
- 5/4: Psalm 46:1-11
- 5/5: Psalm 62:1-12
- 5/6: Psalm 71:1-24
- 5/7: Psalm 91:1-16
- **Video: Yakhel/Hope**
- 5/8: Psalm 121:1-8
- 5/9: Psalm 145:1-21

Week 6: Psalms of Praise

- 5/17: Psalm 65:1-13
- 5/18: Psalm 104:1-18
- 5/19: Psalm 104:19-35
- 5/20: Psalm 136:1-26
- 5/21: Psalm 146:1-10
- 5/22: Psalm 147:1-20
- 5/23: Psalm 148:1-14
- **Video: Psalm 148**
- 5/24: Psalms 149:1-14 and 150:1-6

1

Lord, you alone

PSALM 16

MEMORY VERSE

“The Lord is my shepherd,
I lack nothing.”

– PSALM 23:1

AN INVITATION TO SPIRITUAL PRACTICE:

PRAYER IN THE NIGHT

How’s your sleep? Are you one of those enviable people who fall asleep quickly or do you toss and turn all night? I was always a rock-hard sleeper until I hit midlife. Now I often wake a time or two in the middle of the night, and I nearly always wake earlier than I need to without being able to get back to sleep. Pastor Daryl and Pastor Jackson face similar struggles. Sleep can be tough!

This week’s invitation to spiritual practice is to begin your sleep with a simple prayer from Psalm 16 that will remind you of God’s presence. Write it down somewhere that you’re sure to see it (perhaps your nightstand, fridge, or phone) and pray it when you lie down to sleep and any time you wake during the night:

I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. –Psalm 16:7

Then reflect: what was it like to give those simple moments back to God?

AN INVITATION TO STUDY:

Psalm 16 is called “a miktam of David.” Just one small problem—we don’t know what a miktam is anymore! The definition of the Hebrew term has been lost to us through the ages. (In other writings it means “the lid of a pot,” but that doesn’t seem to apply here.) Most scholars believe it was a musical or poetic term of some kind.

Read Psalm 16:1 aloud.

Q1. What is David asking God to do? Why?

Read Psalm 16:2-4 aloud.

Q2. Who does David delight in? What will happen to people who run after other gods?

Read Psalm 16:5-11 aloud.

Q3. Why does the Psalmist now feel secure? What has God done for him? (v.5-8).

Q4. What three descriptions does David use to express that he is joyful and secure (v.9)? What deeper truths about a person (the heart may also mean the emotions, for example) might each of these three represent?

AN INVITATION TO REFLECTION:

In *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*, Tim Keller writes, “The Old Testament shows us a God who so deliberately sets his heart upon us that our condition affects him.” Isaiah refers to God as “Immanuel,” which means God-with-us. The Psalms are a continual reminder to us of God’s love and nearness.

Though this Psalm begins in a fearful place (“Keep me safe!” v.1), it ends with assurances of God’s care, providence, and closeness.

Q1. Has voicing your concerns to God ever brought you reassurance like this? Share the story.

Q2. Have you ever experienced a time of “running after other gods” (v.4)? (Perhaps not *gods*, exactly, but idols—anything else that took the place of God as your first

priority—money, sports, followers, travel, etc.) Did you experience any suffering during that time? What ultimately drew you back to Jesus?

Q3. In David's day, there was not a clear understanding of the afterlife. In Hebrew the word for grave—*sheol*—was thought to be a place of desolation and perhaps punishment. We read of David's fears about this in verse 10, but also of his trust that God will care for him even after death. What beliefs do you have about the afterlife? Do you think you've based these beliefs on Scripture, movies, books, cultural norms, or something else? (For further reading, check out NT Wright's book *Surprised by Hope*.)

Q4. The Psalmist trusts God because God has shown care for him now, but also because God will show care for him later ("you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead" v.10). How is God showing care for you right now? What care do you hope God offers to you after your death?

AN INVITATION TO ACTION:

You're invited to choose one or more of the following to do on your own over the next week as a way of deepening the lesson of the Bible study through action. For our series on the Psalms, each will be related to a practice of prayer. Choose one today and make a plan to undertake it before next week's study.

1. Memorize!

Commit this study's featured Scripture to memory by learning one verse each week. (The verse is found at the start of each week's lesson.) By the end of our seven week study, you'll have a wonderful passage of Scripture hidden in your heart!

2. Pray in the night

Follow this lesson's opening spiritual practice by offering a Psalm of prayer to God upon waking, either in the middle of the night or when you rise.

3. Offer your fears to God in prayer

We often fear the wrong things. We fear terrorism when we're much more likely to die of heart disease. We fear flying when, statistically, driving is much more dangerous. The good news is that God welcomes our whole selves, whether our fears are based in reality or a little bit mis-aligned with our actual risks.

We are never alone in facing our fears. God has seen and heard it all! You are loved no matter what, so be free to share anything that's on your heart.

This week, whenever you feel afraid, let Psalm 16:1 be your guide: *Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge.* The Psalmist doesn't panic or cycle on his fear, instead he offers it to God and trusts God to watch over him.

2

save me!

PSALM 116:1-19

MEMORY VERSE

“He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me besides quiet waters..”

– PSALM 23:2

AN INVITATION TO SPIRITUAL PRACTICE:

IMMEDIATE PRAYER

For this week’s spiritual practice, you are invited to pray immediately when either (or both!) of the following two things happen:

- 1) Something wonderful
- 2) Something terrible

At the first church I (Courtney) pastored in rural Wisconsin, the teens in the youth group would respond to the first type with “Yay, God!” and to the second with, “Lord, hear our prayer.” You are invited to do the same.

One of the wonderful things about practicing short, immediate prayers is that they tune our attention to God more regularly throughout the day. Sometimes we may want to pray a really good prayer, or take a lot of time later to pray, but then we forget! Praying immediately connects us to God in all the highs and lows of our days.

Then reflect: *What was it like to pray so many short, simple prayers throughout the day? What did you notice about yourself? About God?*

AN INVITATION TO STUDY:

It is important to remember that the Psalms were written originally as Hebrew poetry. As any of you who speak more than one language know, translation is challenging work, and translating things that have a particular rhythm in the original language flair can be even trickier.

As one translator of the Psalms, Robert Alter, said, “There is this terrific compactness of the Hebrew. Typically in Biblical Hebrew, you can say in two or three words what takes five or six words or more in English.”

We recently experienced a small version of this challenge when trying to translate one of Felicity’s favorite songs–”Soy Yo.” Does it mean “I am”? Or is it more properly translated, “It’s me”? Those two short phrases have subtle differences in meaning, and even a small difference can change the theme of a text.

For this reason, it can be particularly helpful to read the Psalms in a number of different translations. We typically use the NIV (New International Version) at PCOM, but there are many others out there like the NRSV, the NLT, and the CEB that can give us a fuller picture of a Psalm when read alongside the NIV. It’s all part of the fun of learning more about the Bible!

Read Psalm 116:1-4 aloud.

Q1. Why does the Psalmist say he loves the Lord? What scary thing happened to him?

Read Psalm 116:5-7 aloud.

Q2. What do you think it means that “The Lord protects the unwary” (v.6)? What does it mean to you that our attention and awareness are not prerequisites for the care of God?

Read Psalm 116:8-14 aloud.

Q3. The Psalmist expresses his gratitude to God for the three things God has saved him from (v.8). What are these three things, and what do you think they might represent? (For example, “my feet from stumbling,” is not just about physically tripping over something.)

Read Psalm 116:15-19 aloud.

Q4. Verse 15 is often quoted at funerals. What do you think it means that the death of the Lord’s faithful servants is precious to him? Do you find this comforting, unsettling, or something else?

AN INVITATION TO REFLECTION:

Q1. Have you ever felt like the Psalmist does in v.3? Share (or write) the story.

Q2. Is your soul at rest, troubled, or somewhere in between? What would it look like for your soul to “return to your rest” (v.7)? How might God’s goodness help your soul feel more at ease?

Q3. The Psalms make lots of space for hyperbole (exaggeration). Here the Psalmist is so overwhelmed that he says, “Everyone is a liar” (v.11). Have you ever felt like this? In what ways can crisis tempt us to exaggerate?

Q4. David was never a prisoner (that we know of!), yet he writes of God that “You have freed me from my chains” (v.16). What might he be referring to? What chains has God freed you from?

**Heads up: for next week you will need anointing oil for the opening spiritual practice. Stop by the church office to pick*

some up, or plan to use any oil (olive, lavender essential, canola, etc.) you have on hand.

AN INVITATION TO ACTION:

1. Learn more about how the Psalms were written

Robert Alter is a translator of the Psalms and Marilynne Robinson is a Christian essayist and novelist. Join them for a short, three minute video as they discuss together the beauties and challenges of translating Hebrew poetry and reading the Psalms in English. You can view it here: tinyurl.com/mcnd7rn9.

2. Practice your immediate prayers

Use the prompt at the beginning of this lesson to pray immediately whenever your heart is moved by something wonderful or terrible. Then, expand this prayer practice into more nuanced areas of your life (pray when you see something beautiful, when you see someone in trouble, when you are afraid, etc.).

3. Remember the saints

Psalm 116:15 tells us that the death of the faithful is precious in the sight of the Lord. Who are the saints in your life who have died? Spend a few moments this week reflecting upon their memories, the legacy of faith they left behind, and how you might follow their example.

3

my shepherd

PSALM 23

MEMORY VERSE

“He refreshes my soul. He guides me along
the right paths. For his name’s sake.”

– PSALM 23:3

AN INVITATION TO SPIRITUAL PRACTICE:

PRAYER OF ANOINTING

In Scripture, oil is often used as a sign of blessing, sealing, or healing. In the Hebrew Bible, kings are anointed with oil. In the New Testament, the church elders are invited to pray over the sick and anoint them.

Today we are going to anoint one another with oil and a prayer of blessing. Spend a moment or two thinking about the blessing you’d like to ask God for. Maybe you’re in need of more patience, a good night’s sleep, help with your schoolwork, a new job, or a friend. Decide what you’d like to ask someone in your group to pray over you (or a pastor or a loved one, if you’re doing this study on your own). There is oil available in the church office, or you may use any that you have on hand (olive, essential, canola, etc.).

Dear God, we ask that you would bless [Name] with what they need. Give them [repeat their request]. Amen.

Then reflect: *What was it like to bring this request before God with a friend? What did the physical act of being anointed feel like? What do you hope God does next?*

AN INVITATION TO STUDY:

In *God's Prayer Book*, Ben Patterson writes that we can "Praise the Good Shepherd for being both vast and near." The tremendous, holy majesty of God draws close to us in the person of the Good Shepherd.

Read Psalm 23:1 aloud.

Q1. Who is your shepherd? What do you lack?

Read Psalm 23:2-3 aloud.

Q2. What do you make of the verb that begins v. 2 - "he *makes* me lie down"? Why do you think God doesn't invite us to lie down or ask us to lie down, but instead makes us? What are the other three things God does for us in these two verses, and what do you think they mean?

Read Psalm 23:4-6 aloud.

Q3. Why needn't we fear evil, even in the darkest valley? (In the King James translation, this reads "the valley of the shadow of death!")

Q4. What two things does God do for the Psalmist in v. 5? Why do you think God prepares a table in the presence of the Psalmist's enemies? What do you think David means by this?

AN INVITATION TO REFLECTION:

Q1. This Psalm opens with a strong statement: I lack nothing (v. 1). In what ways is this true in your life? Are there any ways it feels untrue?

Q2. Shepherds regularly carried a rod and a staff to help them herd sheep. The staff was the long, curved shepherd's staff we often see in Christmas pageants today. The rod would have been a short, sturdy stick used to help guide the sheep along the right path and to protect them against predators. Why do you think the Psalmist writes that these two things comfort him (v. 4)?

Q3. When in your life have you walked through a dark valley? Share (or write) the story. What difference has the presence of God made for you in the valley of the shadow of death? What difference has the presence of others made for you?

Q4. Have you ever walked down a dark alley late at night? It can be very scary to feel like someone or something is following you. Yet the Psalmist sees not evil following him, but instead God's goodness and love. How would it change your daily life if you looked over your shoulder and saw God's goodness and love chasing after you?

AN INVITATION TO ACTION:

1. Lie down

Are you a “doer”? Someone who is always moving, always on the go, always serving or creating or working hard? Perhaps God’s invitation to you this week is to lie down in green pastures. Schedule yourself a nap or give yourself permission to sleep in or make an appointment with your sofa and your softest blanket. As you settle into rest, notice what happens in your body, mind, and spirit. How does God meet us within the gift of rest?

2. Fear no evil

Offer your fears to God in prayer and receive his comfort, assurance, and peace. Name as many specific ones as you can and then sit silently, breathing deeply and listening to God’s response.

3. Watch for goodness and mercy

Poet Ross Gay, in *The Book of Delights*, writes of developing a “delight radar” as he looks for things that bring him joy. He notices that finding delights makes his “delight radar” more sensitive, leading to him finding more delights in the simple things of life. The same can be true of our radar for noticing God’s goodness and mercy. Begin to look for it and you will start seeing it everywhere! Spend this week honing your goodness and mercy radar. What do you notice about the work of God in the world?

4

my rock of refuge

PSALM 31:1-5, 15-16

MEMORY VERSE

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I will feel no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

– PSALM 23:4

AN INVITATION TO SPIRITUAL PRACTICE:

PRAYERS FOR HELP

Anne Lamott once wrote that the two prayers she prays most often are, “Help me, help me, help me,” and “thank you, thank you, thank you.” Seeking God’s assistance isn’t selfish—God invites it! We can ask for help for others, but God also welcomes our requests for help for ourselves.

Take a moment to ponder: Where do you need help in your life today? Where are you feeling discouraged, in need of practical assistance, or ready for fresh inspiration? Pray to God for help, either in your own words, or with the following prayer:

*Dear God, I could really use your help with _____.
Help me to trust that you see me and love me, that nothing
in my life is outside of your concern. Give me eyes to see your
hand at work, and a heart of trust in your love. Amen.*

Then reflect: How did it feel to ask God for help? Do you often pray for help or almost never? Why do you think this is?

AN INVITATION TO STUDY:

Read Psalm 31:1-2 aloud.

Q1. What are three of the things is David asking God for?

Read Psalm 31:3-5 aloud.

Q2. What does David call God (v.3)? What does he ask of God (v.4)? How might these two things be connected?

Q3. Do you recognize the first portion of v.5 from anywhere in the New Testament? Why might this be significant, and what does it teach us about Jesus? (Hint: look up Luke 23:46.)

In her book *Refugia Faith*, Deb Rienstra writes of the importance of seasons, time, and traditions in our Christian faith. She writes, “The ecumenical church has long understood that we need patterns—patterns that give shape and meaning to our days, weeks, and years. Those patterns, thoughtfully arranged, give us something steady to uphold us, sturdy fence posts to grab onto when wilder winds blow.”

Read Psalm 31:15-16 aloud.

Q4. Whose hands does David say his time resides in? Whose hands does he want deliverance from? What does it mean, in practical terms, to be in an enemy’s hands? What about in God’s?

AN INVITATION TO REFLECTION:

The Psalms are full of poetic language, similies and metaphors and vivid imagery. We know that God is not literally a rock, of course, but is strong, stable, and solid like a rock.

Q1. What clues do you look for when deciding whether or not to take a verse literally?

Q2. The Psalmist asks for God to come quickly (v.2). This is a bold request! It shows his trust in God to ask for what he really wants. Do you feel this free in your prayers? Why or why not?

Q3. What do you think it means that God is our refuge (v.4)? Are there any examples of how this has been true in your life?

Q4. What do you think it means to have God's face shine on you (v.16)? We pray a similar prayer over the children in the Awake service on Sunday, from Numbers 6:24-26. Have you ever felt this kind of love from God? From anyone else?

AN INVITATION TO ACTION:

1. Pray an impatient prayer

Channel your inner Psalmist and ask God to move quickly on your behalf or someone else's (v.2). How does it feel to pray with such urgency and faith? Now watch and wait to see what God will do, both with your request and inside of you.

2. Pray for safety

What do you fear? Ask God to give you safety (v.3-4). Be specific in your request and honest about your fears. Then ponder your next steps—how might they change if you embraced God's courage?

3. Refresh your memorization

We are nearly to the end of our study! If you've committed to memorizing Scripture, take some time this week to go back over the verses you've learned.

5

come and hear

PSALM 66:8-20

MEMORY VERSE

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.”

– PSALM 23:5

AN INVITATION TO SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: *CONFESSION*

In the book of James, the author instructs us to “confess our sins to one another.” Why? So we might be shamed? Embarrassed? Ridiculed? No. So that we might be healed!

Confession is an ancient Christian practice of speaking our sins before God or another person so that they may remind us of God’s love and forgiveness. It can also be a way of inviting others into our lives as accountability partners. (For example: it is much harder to keep gossiping about others if your friends remind you not to!)

For today’s spiritual practice, take a few moments to search your heart. Is there anything you’ve made into an idol (i.e. put before God in your priorities)? Is there any wrong you have done or right thing you have left undone? We are all sinners—there is no need to pretend otherwise.

Now take a moment and speak your sin aloud, either to your small group or to God in prayer. Then allow God (and your group) to remind you of his forgiveness, grace, and love. Then reflect: how did it feel to confess?

AN INVITATION TO STUDY:

Read Psalm 66:8-12 aloud.

Q1. What two good things does God do for the Psalmist (v.8-9)? What do you think it means for God to “preserve our lives” or “keep our feet from slipping”?

Q2. What four difficult things did God allow to happen to the Psalmist (v.10-12)? How do things end (v.12)? What do you think is the significance of the abundance following the hardships?

Read Psalm 66:13-20 aloud.

Q3. What does the Psalmist do in response to God’s salvation and care?

Q4. The Psalmist praises God for not rejecting his prayer or withholding his love. Is this something you think God might do? Have you seen similar prayers answered elsewhere in the Bible?

AN INVITATION TO REFLECTION:

Q1. When we face hardship, it can be tempting to view it as God's punishment or testing. There are certainly natural consequences for sin (touch a hot stove and you will receive a burn, lie to a friend and you might lose that friend, etc.). Is this the same as punishment from God?

Q2. Do you think that God is punishing the Psalmist or does it just feel that way to him? Do you think there is a difference between receiving discipline and receiving punishment?

Q3. Have you ever made promises to God while you were in trouble? Did you keep those promises after you were rescued (v.14)?

Q4. What has God done for you (v.16)? How might you tell others about this providential care?

AN INVITATION TO ACTION:

1. Testimony

Write out the story of what God has done for you. You may wish to focus on one specific area (how you came to know Jesus for the first time, for example, or when God very clearly answered a desperate prayer) or write up a broader story of God's faithfulness. Then think: who might be encouraged by this story? Who might God be inviting you to share it with?

2. Release sin

The Psalmist talks about not cherishing any sin in his heart. Search your own heart this week: is there any sin that you are cherishing and refusing to give up? How might you confess it to God, or perhaps to God in the presence of a pastor or other trusted faith-leader, this week?

3. Reflect

The Psalmist writes of moving from hardship to abundance. He has gone through struggles and trials, but God brings him out the other side and now he is filled with praise. Reflect upon a season in your life where you moved from hardship to abundance. How did God meet you in the midst of your suffering? How has God met you in the joy on the other side?

6

defender of widows

PSALM 68:1-10

MEMORY VERSE

“Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

– PSALM 23:6

AN INVITATION TO SPIRITUAL PRACTICE:

WORK FOR GOOD

We don't have to look far to notice things that have gone wrong in our world. God invites us to lament the practices of violence and evil, and he also invites us to work alongside him for good in the world.

This week, identify one small area where God is inviting you to work with him to bring goodness. Perhaps it's time to serve at a local food pantry, invest in a nearby school, visit the lonely at an assisted living facility, or write a letter to your congressperson.

Then pray: ask Jesus to be present to the people involved, to help good flourish, and to give you wisdom and courage as you take the next steps.

Finally, share with your group (or a friend, if you're doing this study alone) and ask them to keep you accountable in your work for good this week.

AN INVITATION TO STUDY:

Read Psalm 68:1-3 aloud.

Q1. What four things does David hope will happen to his enemies?

Read Psalm 68:4-6 aloud.

Q2. God stands in the gap of human loss and brokenness. What does he do for the fatherless? The widows? The lonely? Why do you think this is important?

Read Psalm 68:7-10 aloud.

Q3. What does rain do for God's people? In what ways does God refresh us when we are weary, overwhelmed, or at our wit's end?

Q4. How are the poor provided for, according to David? Have you seen this happen in our world today?

AN INVITATION TO REFLECTION:

Psalms are poems, filled with imagery and feelings and word-pictures. They are often intended to evoke feelings and move us to a deeper life of prayer and connection with God rather than give instruction, like other Scriptures do.

Q1. What feelings is the Psalmist seeking in v.1-3? What does he need from God in order to feel that way?

Q2. V. 6 says a lot about the feelings of the lonely, the imprisoned, and the rebellious. Obviously not all rebellious people live in sun-scorched lands (beware, Arizona!) but to live in rebellion against God leads to feelings of barrenness and exposure. How does it feel to be a freed prisoner? What has God set you free from?

Q3. In what ways does God set the lonely in families? Are there any examples from your life of a time God or the church provided needed family for you?

Q4. It can be easy to develop a scarcity mindset, especially in times of need. We watch every penny, curtail celebrations, and tighten our financial belts. Yet our God is a God of abundance and bounty (v.9-10)! There are ways to embrace this abundance that don't break the bank. How can we embrace a generous mindset and share that with our communities?

AN INVITATION TO ACTION:

1. Testimony

Write out the story of what God has done for you. You may wish to focus on one specific area (how you came to know Jesus for the first time, for example, or when God very clearly answered a desperate prayer) or write up a broader story of God's faithfulness. Then think: who might be encouraged by this story? Who might God be inviting you to share it with?

2. Release sin

The Psalmist talks about not cherishing any sin in his heart. Search your own heart this week: is there any sin that you are cherishing and refusing to give up? How might you confess it to God, or perhaps to God in the presence of a pastor or other trusted faith-leader, this week?

3. Reflect

The Psalmist writes of moving from hardship to abundance. He has gone through struggles and trials, but God brings him out the other side and now he is filled with praise. Reflect upon a season in your life where you moved from hardship to abundance. How did God meet you in the midst of your suffering? How has God met you in the joy on the other side?

7

Lord of all creation

PSALM 104:24-35

MEMORY VERSE

REVIEW PSALM 23:1-6

AN INVITATION TO SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: *AWE WALK*

In a study from UCSF's Center for Aging and Wellness, adults who struggled with depression or loneliness were put into two groups. The first was asked to take a daily walk. Just ten or fifteen minutes. Their overall outlook on life improved, which wasn't surprising—most of us know that walking and being outdoors are good for our health! But the results for the second group was even more interesting. Those participants were asked to go on a 10-15 minute walk with one distinct difference: while walking, they were asked to look for things that brought them awe. Their outlook on life improved even more dramatically.

God has given us the gift of nature. Today's Psalm praises the God who created us and the earth, with all its wonders and creatures. For today's spiritual practice, take an awe walk of your own. Look for things that amaze you: big things (clouds! wind! trees!) and small (the pattern on a leaf, the center of a flower, an ant traversing a sidewalk). Then reflect: how is God's glory shown to us through his creation? How can engaging in nature-based practices bring us closer to the heart of God?

AN INVITATION TO STUDY:

In his commentary on the Psalms, James L. Mays writes that Psalm 104 “reads as if it were a poetic version of God’s recent appraisal of his work in Genesis 1: ‘And God saw that it was good.’”

Read Psalm 104:24-26 aloud.

No one knows exactly what the Leviathan was. Many scholars believe it was a crocodile or other large ocean-animal. A few have speculated that it was an ancient sea monster that has since gone extinct (Isaiah 27:1 seems to support this hypothesis). Either way, we do know that Leviathan was massive and that it had become a symbol of power to God’s people during the time of the Psalms.

Q1. How many things has God created? Why do you think this matters?

In Nature’s Bible, poet Kent Gramm describes the wonder and majesty and joy of creation. He writes,

“All of this: moons and mastadons,
pterodactyls, petals on water,
the laugh of the loon—
in God’s own image
the stars in heaven,
robins in their nests,
reflections in each other’s eyes,
and longing in the heart of creation.”

Read Psalm 104:27-30 aloud.

Q2. Who feeds the creatures? Who has ultimate control over their lives? What do you think it means that the Spirit

of God can “renew the face of the ground”?

Read Psalm 104:31-35 aloud.

Q3. V. 32 seems to attribute the power of God to natural disasters like earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. How do we reconcile God’s lovingkindness with these sorts of adverse events in our world?

Q4. A very cheerful Psalm ends with a wish for sinners to vanish and the wicked to be no more (v.35). Since we are sinners, too, what do you think David is really asking for? How do evil and violence get in the way of the flourishing of God’s creation? What do you think is significant about David praying for God to make this happen, rather than taking things into his own hands?

AN INVITATION TO REFLECTION:

Q1. Psalm 104 is a hymn of gratitude for the biodiversity God has created. Earlier in this Psalm things like donkeys and ravens, springs of water and lions are mentioned. In today’s passage, the Psalmist praises God for the sea and its creatures. In Biblical times, the sea was often a sign of darkness and chaos. Why do you think the Psalmist praises God for creating even something so wild and unknown?

Q2. According to James L. Mays, in his commentary on the Psalms, “[Psalm 104] also puts us in our place as one of many living things made by the Lord and utterly dependent upon him.” What does it mean to you to see yourself as part of God’s creation? Do you feel utterly dependent upon God? If not, what else are you relying upon?

Q3. It can feel like bragging or pridefulness to rejoice in something we have made, but God does it all the time! This shows us that it is okay to take joy in the work of our hands and in our creative projects. What is something you’ve created lately that brought you joy? (Hint: this may be artistic, but it could also be something you baked, a great basketball play, a well-done homework assignment, even a spreadsheet!) Describe it to the group, or write about it here.

Q4. Many Psalms remind us that singing praise to God can be one of the great joys of our lives. What role does music have in your life of worship? Do you have a favorite worship song? What about it helps you praise God?

AN INVITATION TO ACTION:

1. Take an extended awe walk

Go to a beautiful place (beach! park! desert!) and take an extended awe walk. Look for things that bring you wonder, and then praise God as the Psalmist does when you encounter each one.

Then reflect: how did being out in nature with God affect your faith? Did it change your understanding of all of who God is?

2. Praise God in song

You know that favorite worship song that you wrote about in question 4? Listen to it today. Close your eyes and take in all of the words, the instrumentation, and the melody. Sing along, if you like.

3. Prepare for summer study

While this will be our last all-church Bible study until August, we don't stop learning and growing during the summer months! You're invited to do two things as the days grow longer and hotter:

First, reach out to your neighbors for fellowship. Summer is a great time to host a block party, go for a group hike, or meet up with friends at the beach. Relationships grow when we can give them unstructured time for conversation (and often food, too!).

Secondly, consider adding one of the following reads to your summer list, to keep your mind growing in God.

Alicia Akins, *Invitations to Abundance*

Fleming Rutledge, *The Undoing of Death*

Corrie Ten Boom, *The Hiding Place*

Rich Villodas, *A Deeply Formed Life*

A Place for Prayer Requests

A Place for Prayer Requests

A Place for Prayer Requests

Bibliography & Suggestions for Further Reading:

Kent Gramm, *Nature's Bible*

Anne Lamott, *Help, Thanks, Wow*

Tim Keller, *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*

James L. Mays, *Psalms: Interpretation Commentary*

Ben Patterson, *God's Prayer Book*

Deb Rienstra, *Refugia Faith*

NT Wright, *Surprised by Hope*



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STUDY GUIDE