

A Study through the Psalms

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Small Group Resources



Survey of Psalms

Psalms by the Numbers



5

BOOKS



7

NAMED
AUTHORS



150

PSALMS



30,000

HEBREW WORDS

(3rd place behind
Jeremiah and Genesis)

900 Years

Psalm 90
circa 1,440 B.C

Psalm 137
circa 540 B.C

Authors

David	75
Asaph	12
Sons of Korah	11
Solomon	2
Moses	1
Heman the Ezrahite	1
Ethan the Ezrahite	1
Anonymous	47

Key Word

Blessed

- 26x across the bookends and each of the five sections of Psalms
- Translations: how happy, how blessed, how blessed, or how fortunate
- Use: Never used of God
- Meaning: a sense of longing ("I wish I were that person because of the benefits they get")

Desire to be like the one who delights in God's Word (1:1–2), is forgiven by God (32:1), fears (112:1), trusts (40:4), and worships God (89:15)!

Structure of Psalms

Section	Psalms	Closing Doxology	“Blessed”
<i>Introduction</i>	1–2		1:1; 2:12
Book I	3–41	41:13	32:1–2; 40:5; 41:2
Book II	42–72	72:15–19	65:5
Book III	73–89	89:52	84:5–6, 13; 89:16
Book IV	90–106	106:48	94:12; 106:3
Book V	107–145	146:1–150:6	112:1; 119:1–2; 127:5; 128:1–2; 137:9; 144:15
<i>Conclusion</i>	146–150		146:5

Message of Psalms

The blessed man responds correctly to God’s sovereign rule over His creation.

Keys for Understanding

REMEMBER THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Many truths from Psalms are directly applicable to us, but some things are Israel-specific. With those, we must find the timeless truth in a time-bound text before applying that timeless truth to our current context.

OBSERVE THE FLOW OF THOUGHT WITHIN THE PSALM

Many psalms are divided into sections of verses. Each section somehow contributes to the big truth of the psalm. We understand the big truth best when we understand the parts or sections that build to the big truth.

CONSIDER THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LINES

Verses in Hebrew Poetry can be divided into lines. Analyzing the relationship between lines helps reveal what the psalm might be emphasizing. Keep a lookout for two types of emphasis: emphasis through close repetition and emphasis through contrast.

INTERPRET THE WORD PICTURES

Hebrew Poetry likes word pictures (e.g., “The LORD is my rock,” 18:2) and has a specific meaning when using them. What’s the topic (*Yahweh*)? What’s the picture (*a rock*)? What’s the best point of connection (*position of strength*)?

Prayer Requests & Praises

[illegible]

9/9 | What are Small Groups?

Dr. Andrew Goodwill

Leaders: Most of this first week should be spent getting to know your group and helping them get comfortable with each other. Please read the lesson together at some point.

Since Fall 2020, small groups have been a key element of our MBU community. Once a week, our campus essentially shuts down as 40–45 small groups meet in every corner of campus to study God’s Word together. Faculty and staff pause their grading, office work, or maintenance projects to lead their groups. We want to be a close community of believers who edify and help one another as we study and apply the inspired and sufficient Word of God.

Why do we do small groups?

Chapel is at the heart of what we do at MBU because we value the preaching and teaching of God’s Word as a primary means by which believers grow. We cannot minimize the importance of gathering as a group to hear “thus says the Lord.” At the same time, not every gathering around God’s Word must look the same! Small groups enable us to emphasize the importance of studying and applying God’s Word through a more relational setting than chapel in the gym. We want to build relationships formed around God’s Word!

What are the benefits?

Snacks and coffee could be listed here, but group leaders do not need to bring anything (idea: work as a group to bring snacks/drinks for a special small group time). When I think of benefits, three things come to mind.

One, we get to know each other. You will spend over twenty hours in small groups this year talking (or maybe staring blankly), praying (Gal. 6:2), and encouraging each other through God’s Word (1 Thess. 5:11).

Two, we get to know God’s Word. Small groups study the Bible. Lessons differ in nature (devotional vs. study) and approach (hands-on interpretation vs. application-heavy). May God help us know Him more through His Word so that our love for Him will increase, and our motivation to serve Him will abound.

Three, we learn how to participate in small groups. You will likely have 3–4 different small groups and group leaders while you are at Marantha, depending on how long you are here. Each group and leader will have strengths and weaknesses. Every group provides an opportunity for you to learn how to engage at a personal level as you study and apply God’s Word with a group of believers. You will also be better equipped to lead a small group Bible study because of your experience and the observations you have made about your group leader—good and bad. What type of blessing could you be to a pastor and local church with that experience and skill?

What is the plan?

We are looking at the Book of Psalms! The lessons on Psalms cover fifteen individual psalms. Most are short enough to cover in one lesson, but two of the psalms will take multiple weeks (Psalm 51; Psalm 139). Other lessons focus on a topic within Psalms (e.g., worship), a key idea (e.g., how do we relate to the local church?), or a meditation on an upcoming holiday (e.g., Thanksgiving or Easter).

In the end, we want to (1) understand why God gave us Psalms, (2) know how to study Psalms, and (3) put into practice what we learn from Psalms.

What can you do as a student?

- 1) Come ready to engage with others around God’s Word. Come to participate, not to spectate.
- 2) Do the little things that might help you engage (e.g., bring a pen, bring a printed Bible to remove distractions, drink coffee).
- 3) Start talking early when you get there. Ask how people are doing; share a praise ... or an embarrassing story from the week.
- 4) Faithfully read and meditate on God’s Word outside small group. Your participation in small groups should flow out of your private time with God, not as a substitute for it.

Let us have a great year building relationships centered around God’s Word!

9/16 | The Necessity of God's Word

Rebecca Brock | Psalm 119:92

If you're completely transparent, what can't you live without? Finish this sentence, "I can't imagine my life without _____." Maybe your first thought was coffee, or Bubbl'r, or your phone, or friends. How far down the list is God's Word? Pause for a minute and contemplate this: If you lost all access to Scripture tomorrow, would your life be impacted in any meaningful way? Could you say, "I can't live without the Bible"?

The current conversation about Scripture revolves around the word *sufficient*. Faithful theologians and biblical counselors hold to the sufficiency of the Word of God—the Word is all believers need for soul-level flourishing. However, sometimes, Christians mistakenly think believers are disadvantaged, that the world has abundant resources and yet we must hobble along with what's barely sufficient to cover our problems. If we're honest, we can look at the world with some FOMO and think, "Ok. I'll try to be content with *just* the Bible."

While the *sufficiency* conversation is important, the *necessity* conversation may be even more important. Yes, the Bible surpasses all other sources as the source that robustly, sufficiently meets all inner person needs; but even more, the Bible is *necessary* for those needs. Human needs cannot be met without the Scripture. The Word is vital for soul healthiness—so much so that we should think, "I can't even imagine trying to live without the Bible!" The world offers Band-Aids while the Scriptures provide healing from the Creator of our souls.

Christ clearly teaches us the necessity of the Scripture. In Luke 10, Mary sat at our Savior's feet and "heard his word" (v. 39). Christ calls that activity the "one needful thing" and then praises Mary for choosing what is *necessary* even over what seems urgent (v. 40). Christ labels hearing his word as singularly needful. Do you?

In the middle of Psalm 119, a long poem expounding the value of God's Word, the Psalmist gives a rather poignant testimony in verse 92. He states that God's law (instruction) has been the delight (desire) of his life, which has sustained him in his affliction (miserable situation). Notice the condition at the beginning of the verse: *unless*. He's making

the claim that God's Word preserved his life in difficulty—that he wouldn't have survived without it.

But notice also, he includes his attitude toward God's law: God's instruction is his delight or what makes his heart glad. As the psalmist faced deep difficulty, his reflex was to find joy in the words of the Lord. Going to God's Word sustained him in the trial.

We could paraphrase his testimony in this way: "If your instruction hadn't been my source of desire and joy that I turned to, I would never have survived my difficult situation." God's Word was *necessary* for his spiritual survival. He couldn't live without the Scripture.

Activity

Psalm 119:92 is just one evidence of the necessity of Scripture. Look up the following verses to find more evidence and complete the sentence below for each passage (i.e., each passage will have a different answer):

*If I want _____, then I **need** the Scripture.*

- Psalm 19:7b; Proverbs 2:6-7

*If I want wisdom, then I **need** the Scripture.*

God breathes out wisdom for us in His Word.

- Psalm 119: 105, 133

If I want direction, then I need the Scripture.

- John 17:17

If I want to be sanctified, then I need the Scripture.

The Scripture is God's means to make us look like Jesus!

Also, if I want to know the truth, then I need the Scripture.

- Romans 15:4

*If I want hope, then I **need** the Scripture.*

- Romans 10:17

*If I want faith, then I **need** the Scripture.*

Beginning at salvation, God develops faith in us as we listen to His Word.

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Peter 2:2

*If I want spiritual maturity, then I **need** the Scripture.*

Reflection

Take a few minutes to silently reflect on these questions.

- 1) Is your faith lacking today? Do you need wisdom, direction, hope, maturity? Then you need to increase your Scripture intake! What practical steps can you take this week toward being in the Word?
- 2) 1 Peter 2:1-2 teaches that we need to turn from sin to desire the Word. What things are choking out a desire for the Scripture in your life?
- 3) Do you see the Scripture as necessary for your spiritual life? As we study Psalms this semester, consider spending time in Psalm 119 in your personal time with God and build a list of reasons why you need God's Word!

Discussion

1. What is one thing you could do differently with your time in God's Word tomorrow and Friday to help it be of higher quality? **Actually do it!** Journal a truth after reading. Use a printed Bible and set your phone aside. Make it first thing in the morning before other things crowd out your day.
2. In what ways could the necessity of God's Word change how we listen to the preaching of God's Word? **Examples:** bring a notebook to take notes. Purpose to grab one truth no matter the speaker. Turn off all notifications from the phone. Sit in a place with fewer distractions.

9/23 | The Necessity of God's Church

Luke DeWald | Matthew 28:18–20 & Acts 2:41–47

God designed authentic healthy discipleship to thrive through the biblical relationships within a healthy local church. Jesus' commission was to: 1) *Go make disciples* ("teach" in v. 18 means "make disciples") (*initiation* - at salvation), 2) *Baptize* those disciples (*identification* - with Jesus, His teaching, and His people), and 3) teach those disciples to obey all that He had commanded (*cultivation*) (Matt. 28:18-20). His plan—as seen in Acts and the Epistles—is for this to happen through the local church (e.g., Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12-14; Eph. 4).

The local church is not merely a good idea, or one optional choice among many for believers to choose from. It is God's intentional design for His people in this dispensation. Several weeks after Jesus gave the Great Commission, the church started, and God gave us a picture of a healthy local church:

- People being saved, baptized, added to the local church, and growing as Jesus' disciples together
- Believers eagerly studying God's Word together
- Christians fellowshiping, worshipping, praying, and serving together
- Christians growing in their reverence for God together
- Believers sharing life and serving one another (publicly with the entire church family, and personally with individuals throughout the week)
- Believers enjoying life together
- Christians shining as a light to the community and the world together
- Believers becoming mature ministry leaders engaged in discipling others together (Acts 2:41-47)

Every believer should be seeking, cultivating, and maintaining a strong relationship with a local church wherever God leads them. While a godly family, Christian education, and biblical resources are valuable, these blessings complement—never replace—God's design for the local church.

Paul often uses the illustration of a body with various kinds of members to help us understand the vital relationship between individual believers and the local church (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12-14; Eph. 4). Your hand, nose, ear, and foot function best and find greatest fulfillment when connected to your body, and your body functions best and finds greatest fulfillment when connected with your hand, nose, ear, and foot. In the same way, God's design is for you and the local church to function best and find greatest fulfillment when you are participating with the local church: speaking the truth in love, growing in Christlikeness, giving, receiving, and helping the body function and grow as it builds itself in love (Eph. 4:15-16).

Discussion

- 1) College is full of “good” things that can become roadblocks to our local church engagement if we let them. What are some of those potential obstacles? Coursework, mismanagement of time, involvement in extracurricular activities, work/financial pressure, feeling that our spiritual needs are met on-campus
- 2) What are negative consequences that could happen if you choose to put the local church as a low priority this year? Example: bad habit of neglecting church (you will be busier later in life!), disobedience to what God wants (bringing consequences)
- 3) Leaders and returning students:
 - a) How do you engage in the local church during the school year?
 - b) What blessings have you seen in the past year or two from your local church involvement?
- 4) What are the signs or ways that you can know if you are connected to the local church or not? **Signs of connection**—You know the current blessings and hardships within the congregation, communicate outside of church, find ways to serve, are involved in more than music/ushering, pray for church people, ask church members for help/advice. **Signs of disconnect**—You spend little time at church before and after services, are not regularly involved during services or in other church events, know other students and some members ... but not many.
- 5) What is one thing you can do at church tonight to start building stronger relationships within the local church?

9/30 | Introduction to Psalms

Dr. Andrew Goodwill

Do you ever get frustrated when someone makes an overly simplistic statement about you? Yes, you may be a music nerd, an athlete, gluten-free, a Southerner, or (gasp) even a New York Jets fan; but you are so much more than that one thing (or at least we hope so). Just as you may not like these oversimplifications of who you are, I imagine the psalmists would dislike our tendency to oversimplify Psalms as just a book on praise and worship. Praise and worship are important, but they are not the only deal. The Psalms are practical and real-to-life. Men wrote them from the foxholes of life or even literal caves as they ran for their lives. They knew what it was like to suffer, to flee to God, to see His salvation, to experience His forgiveness, to be chastened, or to fear. The psalmists praise God but also share their experiences, feelings, and actions in response to God's Word. Let's let Psalms describe itself to us.

Key Word: Blessed

This word appears 26 times and in each of the five sections of the book of Psalms. You may see it translated as "how happy," "how blessed," or "how fortunate." It means "O the benefits" and carries a sense of longing. When someone says, "blessed is the man," they mean, "I wish I were that person because they get these benefits." We should want to be like the person who delights in God's Word (1:1–2), fears God (112:1), trusts in God (40:4), is forgiven by God (32:1), and worships God (89:15).

Question: "Envy" has a negative connotation, but "blessed" in Psalms is like a spiritually-OK envy. Let's think about it this way: what are some characteristics of godly people you know that you wish were more present in your life? [knowledge of the Bible, steadiness, faith, kindness, thanksgiving, love for people...]

Question: The QR code shows all the occurrences of "blessed" in Psalms. After glancing through the list, which one stands out to you and why?



Structure: Praise for Benefits

Psalms 1–2 form the introduction to the whole book and begin and end with the key word: “blessed is the man...” (1:1) and “blessed are all they...” (2:12). This idea of “blessed” is the key theme of Psalms 1–2. They introduce the entire book, then one of the purposes—if not *the* purpose—of Psalms is to show the enviable position of the person who has a close, personal relationship with the God who reigns over all.

Psalms is divided into five books. At a high level, the books build as they go from crisis to praise (Books I and II), lament over struggles (Book III), trust despite struggles (Book IV), and praise for God’s restoration (Book V).¹ More importantly, each book ends with a doxology, a statement of praise to God (41:13; 72:15–19; 89:52; 106:48; 146:1–150:6). No matter the struggle, the blessed who delight in God’s Word (Psalm 1) and trust in Him (Psalm 2) end up praising Him (Psalm 146–150).

Message: A right response to God’s rules

A message statement is just a tool to help us recognize the heartbeat of the book. The blessed man responds correctly to God’s sovereign rule over His creation.² You cannot correctly respond to God until you acknowledge His sovereign rule over everything.

Four big truths about God’s sovereign rule come up regularly in Psalms. One, He is a known ruler. God reveals himself through creation (19:1), names and titles (“God of gods,” 136:2; “Maker,” 95:6), and His word (1:2; 119:1). He describes Himself as gracious, merciful (103:8); great (135:5); exalted (118:16); righteous (145:17); near (145:18); and holy (99:9). The One Who rules all things wants us to know Him!

Question: In a way, the Psalms are meditations on Who God is and what that means for us. In addition to the above, what characteristics, actions, or metaphors about God stand out to you from Psalms? [shepherd, rock, fortress, all present, longsuffering]

¹ General themes adapted from Bruce Waltke, and Fred Zaspel, *How to Read and Understand the Psalms* (Crossway, 2023).

² Adapted from Allen Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms, Volume 1 (Psalms 1–41)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2011), 155.

Two, He is an active ruler. God's word divides into two broad categories: judgment and deliverance. God's wrath is kindled against man's sin (89:46). He judges His people (78:31), the wicked (2:5), and the proud (49:6; 119:21). He delivers the righteous when they pray (3:5).

Three, He is a worthy ruler. Consider how many times the psalmists use words like "worship" (16x), "praise" (94x), and "thanksgiving" (67x).

Four, He is a trustworthy ruler. From the very beginning (1:1; 2:12, "blessed is the..."), those who have a right relationship with God enjoy the benefits of that relationship here below (24:5; 3:8). We can take refuge in Him (2:12), trust Him (4:5), wait on Him (25:3), believe Him (27:13), and hope in Him (31:24).

Yes, Psalms is about praise and worship, but it is also so much more. Through the experiences of the inspired psalmists, we can discover the benefits of the blessed life that comes from responding correctly to the Sovereign God Who is knowable, active, worthy, and trustworthy in His rule over all creation.

Discussion

- 1) Reflect on the lesson. What is one idea that stood out to you because it was new, it puzzled you, or you had not thought about it that way before?
- 2) The four big truths about God's sovereign rule demand a response. What are 1-2 general ways we ought to respond to these truths?
 Known ruler: read His Word looking for Him, see His design in creation; Active ruler: acknowledge His right to give commands, pray; Worthy ruler: give public testimony of thanks, engage our minds when singing about Him; Trustworthy ruler: follow Him rather than going our own way, trust Him no matter how dire the situation looks.
- 3) Consider your list of general responses from question two. What would it look like this week for you as a college student to live out that response? Examples: set aside daily time to read God's word and keep a journal of His character ("known ruler"); when making a decision, pray to God and read His word before asking your friends ("trustworthy ruler")

10/7 | Psalm 1

Dr. Andrew Goodwill

*You must love God's Word to respond
correctly to His rule.*



Observation: Familiarity with a passage can breed laziness in studying the passage. To help us study a well-known psalm, spend a minute observing the text using the QR code.

- 1) What patterns or repetitions stand out? (1) There is a contrast in each section (but, 1:2, 4, 6). (2) The ungodly or wicked are mentioned in each section. (3) The blessed man in 1:1 correlates to the righteous in 1:6.
- 2) Planted (1:3) is not the common word used for planting. It occurs 10x in the Hebrew Bible, with seven of those coming in Ezekiel. Read Ezekiel 19:10 and 13. How do those verses help us understand what planted means in Psalm 1:3? In Ezekiel 19, Israel was transplanted by water and then transplanted into the wilderness. In Psalm 1, the one who delights is transplanted to the most advantageous place possible.

Lesson: What makes a spot-the-difference game fun? Subtlety. You want the side-by-side pictures to closely resemble each other so that the finder must pay attention to spot the difference. The contrast between the blessed man and the ungodly in Psalm 1 is anything but subtle. This does not make a very good spot-the-difference game, but it communicates truth effectively.

Psalm 1 answers two big questions. What is different between the blessed one and the ungodly? Answer: how they relate to God's Word. What difference does one's relationship to God's Word make? Answer: a huge difference. Psalm 1 does not compare the saved with the unsaved. Rather, the psalm compares those who walk rightly with God—which always includes saving faith—and those not walking rightly with God—either the lost or the Christian fulfilling the “lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). In other words, it is possible for believers to find themselves

outside the godly category because of their sinful choices. Let's consider three truths from Psalm 1.

First, our relationship to God's Word defines who we are (1:1–2). The *blessed* man does one thing in the entire psalm—delight in God's Word (1:2). The *ungodly* are described as sinners, but their sin is never described. The thing that makes them *ungodly* is that they do not delight in God's Word. Psalm 1 presents the *righteous* (1:6) and *ungodly* as firm, definable categories based on our relationship to Scripture. The *ungodly* of Psalm 1 may live “respectable” lives on the surface, but they are *ungodly* because they have no heart for God's Word.

Question: If it might be hard to tell from the outside, what are possible indicators that someone is walking, sitting, or standing with sinners rather than delighting in God's Word? Their talk about God and His Word is shallow; there is a disconnect between good words and selfish actions; they are more interested in peer opinions than in godly wisdom.

Second, our relationship to God's Word affects our stability (1:3–4). We are either bearing fruit even through hardships or not bearing fruit (1:3). We are stable through hard times or blown away like chaff. We cannot expect to serve and love God without cherishing and meditating on God's Word. That would be like loving your spouse but hating to spend time with them—not a recipe for success! Delighting regularly in God's Word results in stability and fruitfulness in our service to God.

Question: College is hard. Projects, work, extracurriculars, drama in friend groups, and difficulties with roommates are just a few examples of hardships. Describe how a student rooted in God's Word might handle one of those hardships differently than a student who is not? One who is rooted will not be as tempted to use AI to catch back up; one who is rooted will find satisfaction in God and not in their dramatic friend group; the one who is rooted will patiently work with their roommate and love them rather than blow up and start complaining.

Third, our relationship to God's Word sets the trajectory of our life (1:5–6). The ending of Psalm 1 compares the temporal results of the blessed man and the ungodly. Psalm 1:6 does not refer to our eternal life.

Instead, God guards over (*knows*) the journey of the righteous one (i.e., the one who delights in God's Word), but He allows the journey of the ungodly one to come to ruin (*perish*). For a believer, salvation removes eternal judgement but not earthly consequences. The believer who does not foster a delight for God's Word sets a trajectory toward ruin. What then do we do?

- Test your desire for God's Word. Do you notice when you miss studying God's Word? Is your quiet time with God a chore or a delight? What keeps you from your quiet time or Bible reading?
- Evaluate your actions considering God's Word. Where do you struggle to keep God's Word? Where do you struggle to obey, serve, love, and cleave to God?
- Commit yourself to delight in God's Word. How? Give it priority in your day and week. Give it consistent attention (like dating...). Seek God's help in delighting.

Discussion

- 1) Psalm 1:2 talks about meditating day and night, not just when convenient or part of a class syllabus.
 - a) What can make regular, personal time in God's Word challenging in college? Dorm life schedule, studying late at night, exhaustion of mid-semester busyness, feeling as if you get "enough" through chapel or other venues.
 - b) What are some practical steps to overcome each of those challenges? Push to complete homework earlier in the day so that you can get to sleep earlier, make a plan to actually wake up and read, set a calendar item with reminders for when to do it.
- 2) Meditating and reading God's Word are byproducts of delighting. What might it take for you to delight more in God's Word this next week? Give it priority in your work, give it consistent attention (as if you were "dating" it), seek God's help in delighting (pray about it!), take notes when it is preached, journal what you read, confess known sin because unconfessed sin will take away the delight.

10/14 | Psalm 2

Dr. Andrew Goodwill



*You must trust God's Messiah because God rules
unthreatened by man's schemes.*

Observation: Use the QR code to view a marked-up version of the text. After reading the text and noting the markings, answer the following questions as a group.

- 1) Psalm 2 is Messianic. What are the three different titles given to the Messiah? Anointed (2:2), king (2:6), son (2:7, 12)
- 2) Psalm 2:12 contains both the first and last word from Psalm 1 (in Hebrew or English), which seems to tie the psalms together. What are those words? Perish in 1:6; and blessed in 1:1
- 3) Psalm 2 uses two different words for son. One is Hebrew (2:7) while the other is Aramaic (2:12), which was the trade language. Why is it significant that Psalm 2 uses a non-Hebrew word when talking about a right relationship to the Messiah? The nations/heathen in 2:1 are not just ruled by the Messiah in 2:8–9 but are also invited to trust in Him!

Lesson: When you think of a ridiculously mismatched competition or struggle, what comes to mind? Leader, allow for a few answers.

According to Psalm 2, there is one mismatched struggle that beats all the rest: God vs. anything or everything. The psalm continues ideas from Psalm 1 as it completes the introduction to the Book of Psalms. Remember how Psalm 2 ends with how Psalm 1 begins: blessed (1:1; 2:12). The fortunate follower of God delights in His Word and trusts in His Messiah. The ungodly who perish in 1:6 because they reject God's Word now perish in 2:12 because they reject His Messiah. Psalms 1–2 convey the message that the rest of the book will unpack: the blessed man responds correctly to God's sovereign rule over His creation. Each of the three sections of Psalm 2 conveys a truth about God's rule.

First, the nations of the world passionately rebel against God's rule (2:1–3). Verse 1 asks a rhetorical question meant to show how idiotic it is to fight against God's rule. "Vain" describes the empty result of their

rebellion. Even with the most powerful people revolting against God's rule and His Messiah (2:2), their efforts are vain or empty against Him.

Second, God rules unthreatened by this world's rebellion (2:4–9). He sits enthroned in heaven and just laughs or ridicules them. God has a perfect plan to place His King, Jesus Christ, in Jerusalem (2:5) to rule the nations with a rod of iron (2:6).

Verse 7 introduces the Messiah as “My Son,” which alludes back to the coming Davidic King of 2 Samuel 7:14 (“I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son”). The New Testament identifies “My Son” as Christ three times (Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5). When we put these ideas together, “begotten” describes a coronation, not a beginning. Jesus Christ came as God's promised Davidic King and will return to rule all creation as King (cf. Phil. 2:10). No wonder Revelation alludes to Psalm 2:9 three times when talking about Christ (Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15).

Question: How do you think this truth about God helped the psalmist in other situations of life? Hint: look at Psalm 3. God's unthreatened rule means the psalmist can entrust God with his troubles. God is his rock and fortress (18:2). God deals with his enemies (23:5)

Third, the godly embrace God's rule (2:10–12). In a way, verse 10 is an Old Testament “gospel” invitation. When the psalmist warns the kings and rulers to be wise (2:10), he gives them an implicit invitation to embrace God's rule. What does it look like to embrace God's rule? One, serve God with the appropriate reverence for God's rule. Two, rejoice in God while remembering God's exalted position. Third, pay homage (“kiss” in 2:12), which is to make the Messiah your king. You cannot please God without embracing God's Son, Jesus the Messiah.

Discussion

- 1) “Serve” has a qualifier, “with fear.” How could service with proper reverence be different than just service? Service to God is more than just the motions; it demands the heart. My motivation is God's glory and not my status. I will want my service to be excellent rather than good enough.
- 2) Rejoicing and trembling seem like opposites. How might those ideas actually fit together? Joy comes from knowing God is on our side, but there ought to be a healthy fear of God's chastening. A personal

relationship with God does not mean we can have a casual or flippant relationship to God.

- 3) The blessed person takes refuge or trusts in the Son. What difficult situations could you face this week? What would it look like to take refuge in Jesus knowing God's rules? Answers will vary too much to provide directions on this question.

10/21 | Psalm 8

Dr. Andrew Goodwill

God declares His grandeur.

Observation: Use the QR code to read and view an explanation of the Psalm's structure.

- 1) If an inclusio emphasizes the main idea, how would you describe the main idea of Psalm 8 in your own words? Verses 1 and 10 state the main idea. You could rephrase it in many ways. "Nothing on earth can compare to God Who made it all." / "God's grandeur, glory, or majesty is greater than everything."
- 2) Verse 4 slows us down by using emphasis through close repetition. How would you explain the psalmist's attitude in verse 4? Humility because the God of all glory pays attention to him. Confusion because God's care for man does not seem to fit God's majesty. Curiosity in wondering why God chose to pay attention to man.

Lesson: Imagine you are hiking to a summit that others told you has an amazing view. Unfortunately, fog covers the trail; cell service is weak; and the cloudiness makes your clothes feel damp. With each step, it gets easier to complain about your situation. You reach the summit just as the fog dissipates and the sun breaks through the clouds. All complaining thoughts stop, and you admire the breathtaking view. The view was there the entire hike, but you could not appreciate the beauty until it was revealed. Life is full of reasons to complain until we read passages like Psalm 8 that lift our eyes off our discomfort and complaints to the breathtaking view of God's majesty. Psalm 8 leads us to consider two ways in which God displays His unequalled majesty.

First, God uses the weak to confound the strong (8:2). Verse 2 contrasts two types of people: little ones/infants vs. enemies/avengers. Infants cannot care for their own needs, let alone win a battle against an opposing army. God is so great that He could make the babbling of a baby into lethal weapons against His enemies ("thine" in 8:2). The Bible is full of examples and statements that convey this truth.

Question: When you think about God enabling impossible victories in the Bible, what makes your Mount Rushmore? Genesis 14, Abram and 318 men defeated a coalition of five kings; Judges 7, Gideon and the 300 men defeated the hordes of Midian; 1 Samuel 17, young David defeated a battle-hardened Goliath; Judges 14–15, Samson’s victories over the Philistines.

Second, God pays attention to man (8:3–8). In verses 3–4, David looks up at the grandeur of space and asks in comparison, “What is man?” The two different Hebrew words used for man emphasize man’s fragility. Despite man’s weakness in comparison to creation, God demonstrates his thoughtful care to man (“mindful” and “visit”). How can this be? David never gets to the answer. The “for” that starts 8:5 continues David’s bewilderment and is better translated “and” or “yet” (see how Heb. 2:6–8 quotes it). Consider two additional ideas.

One, even though man is weak, God created man in an elevated position just a “little lower” than angels (8:5). The glory and honor placed on man is the image of God (cf. Gen. 1:26–28). “Angels” is the Hebrew word *elohim*, which means gods or God. However, angel is the better interpretation because Psalm 8 is comparing man to other created things and Hebrews 2:6–8 quotes this verse using the Greek word for angel.

Two, even though man is weak, God gave man authority over creation. David devotes the next three verses to talk about the authority that God has given man to rule over creation. Man can take no credit for it. Just look at the number of references to God in 8:5–6 (thou/thy or you/your). David did not need to include the animal list in verses 7–8 since verse 6 already said “all things.” He lists them so that the immensity of God’s delegated authority takes our breath away even more as we reach the second part of the inclusio: “O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth (8:9)!”

Discussion

- 1) David’s focus is on God, not man, which is why he does not end the psalm with an application statement as he does in other psalms (cf.

2:12, “Kiss the son;” 32:11, “be glad;” 27:14, “wait on the LORD”). If you were to write an application statement to conclude Psalm 8, what would it be and why? “Therefore, hope my soul in God” because He pays special attention to you, or “blessed is the person who has a relationship with this God” because He is living out God’s creative design.

- 2) Verse 2 shows that “you + God = a winning team” (because of the God part of the equation). We can trust God to use us to do things beyond our abilities because He is God. What are some stretching or practically impossible things you may face this month that God has the power to carry you through? Heavy academic projects, difficult confrontation of a friend, payment of a school bill, prolonged illness that makes everything at college hard
- 3) David meditates on God and praises God. In what ways during this next week could you set aside time to meditate on God and praise God? Be specific. Go outside at night and look up while you think about Psalm 8. Start a daily “Goodness of God” journal that records how He cared for you each day. Choose a daily hymn and hum it quietly on the way to class each morning.

10/28 | Psalm 51:1–9

Dr. Tim Johns

King David could be considered a celebrity of sorts. Many people have been sadly disappointed when their favorite “Christian” celebrity has been caught in sin. David’s most well-known accomplishment is his triumph over the giant Goliath with just a sling and a stone. David also has one of the worst incidents of betrayal, adultery, and murder recorded. What is different about David in comparison to so many others who fall into sin is that we can also read of his repentance.

The author of 1 Kings writes that David did what was right in the eyes of the Lord except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. Uriah is listed as one of the mighty men of David, one of the 30 elite soldiers that followed David (2 Sam. 23:39, 1 Chron. 11:41). Uriah, being a Hittite, followed David by choice and showed himself to be an honorable and loyal soldier. While Uriah was away at war, David took Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba, and she became pregnant. David tried to hide his rape and betrayal but could not trick Uriah; instead, he gave Uriah a letter, which he carried back to his commanding officer. This letter required that Uriah be abandoned by his fellow soldiers, left to die alone, and murdered by David through the weapon of their enemies (2 Sam. 11).

David repented when he was confronted, and God forgave him; however, David still bore the pain and punishment of his sins, which even affected his children and the nation of Israel. David wrote Psalm 51 to convey his repentance to the Lord, and it holds valuable instruction for us in approaching God in true repentance. Psalm 51 begins with David’s appeal and confession (next week we will consider his restoration and renewal).

The Appeal (51:1–2)

David openly cries out to God. There is no justification, excuse, or twisting of the truth in his words. There is an expectation of who is in charge: God, and not David. David readily acknowledges that he deserves to be punished, which is indicated by his desire for the mercy of the Lord. He trusts in God’s lovingkindness. Lovingkindness can be better understood as God’s steadfast love. Steadfast love doesn’t change because of circumstances. It always remains; it is a choice to

love regardless of worthiness. David also cries out for God's "tender mercies" to blot out his sin and cleanse him, as someone would their dirty laundry. Note that this psalm doesn't specify Bathsheba and Uriah, so it could be applied to anyone in need of repentance.

Confession (51:3–9)

"Acknowledge" here means to confess. David has not dismissed or ignored his sin. It is so egregious to him that he says it, "is ever before me." Verse four could have been more specific to the particular sins that David committed, but it is likely vague so that whoever is reciting this psalm can identify and confess their sin, which is ultimately always against God. David also identifies that he has never been righteous. Even though God has taught him to understand God from the heart (inward parts) and to know wisdom, he still has failed. David knows that he needs to be clean and that God is the only One Who can wash him and restore him to joy and blot out all of his sin.

Discussion

- 1) What are some excuses that people are tempted to give when they ask for forgiveness when they have sinned? How can that shape our perception of them? They want to explain the reason they sinned (e.g., tired). They want to blame circumstances or background. These and other excuses indicate to us that they are not really grieved over their sin.
- 2) What attitudes do we see reflected in David's appeal? How do those attitudes reflect our thinking about sin? Humility, brokenness, truthfulness (he admits it), sorrow because it was against God. These attitudes show the gravity of our sin and how much it affects our relationship with God.
- 3) David identified the character of God several times (His steadfast love, tender mercies). What is important about how he addresses the Lord? He isn't buttering up God, but is identifying His true character. He knew that he could not save himself. Out of a heart of humility, he depends on God's mercy and, at the same time, expects, but does not take for granted, His love for David.
- 4) David asks to be washed thoroughly from his sins, which means to be cleansed inside and out. Some people, when repenting, still have an expectation of continued sinfulness. Does God also expect that

when He cleanses us, we will sin again? How should this truth motivate us when we repent? We need to really think soberly, as David says in this psalm, about our sin. There isn't a promise never to sin again, but there is a serious confession of sin with the intention of not making provision to sin this way again.

- 5) How should David's example change how we relate to our sin this next week? We should be more aware of the gravity of our sin. We should be broken and humble when we come to God to confess our sin. We need to recognize that we are capable of great sin, just as David was. Our confession should be motivated by God's character.

11/4 | Psalm 51:10–19

Dr. Tim Johns

Even though we might not be famous or even well known, our sins will still damage our testimony before others. Sadly, many people consider themselves beyond God's forgiveness, so there is no repentance. They may know that God forgives sin, but they feel as if they have to do something to earn it and may decide to pursue "self-atonement." Self-atonement means that you need to forgive yourself, that you look to something other than God for forgiveness, which negates being humble before the Lord, Who is the only One Who can forgive and cleanse us from sin. But when we ask for forgiveness and are renewed in our pursuit of the Lord and His righteousness, then even our repentance can potentially have a lasting positive effect on others.

Question: What promises do people make when they are asking for forgiveness? What do you notice about those promises? Many are self-centered or prideful. "I won't do it again." "I promise to be good." There isn't a dependence on God for change, but a manipulation to be forgiven and feeling good, rather than true heart change on their part.

Previously, we looked at the right attitude of humility in David's appeal and his confession to the Lord for his need for cleansing. His openness before the Lord regarding his need showed how serious we also should be about our sin. This week, we are considering what it takes for someone to look to the Lord for restoration and renewal and the potential fruits of our repentance.

Restoration (51:10–12)

David teaches us to ask for something that he cannot do himself. After repentance, he asks God for a new heart and a renewed spirit. He identifies that his sin goes deeper than actions alone, beginning in his heart. Jesus very clearly taught that our sinful behavior comes from the heart (Matt. 15:18-20; Mark 7:20-23). The heart that David and Jesus are talking about is the combined thinking, decision-making—the true part of us that is who we are, what some would call our "self." The renewed spirit might be better understood as a renewed, steadfast orientation towards the things of the Lord, which was lost when we

were sinning. David appears concerned that God's presence would be removed, as it was with Saul. After God cleanses his heart, as the final part of his restoration, he desires the joyful and healthy relationship that he had with the Lord before his downfall into sin.

Question: David remarks that he desires for God to "restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." He is talking about the freedom from being controlled by sin. What concepts/verses from God's Word could we recall so that we rejoice in being free from the control of sin? Rom. 8 – There is therefore now no condemnation . . . ; 1 John 1:9 – He is faithful and just ... to cleanse us ...

Question: David desires to teach "transgressors" God's ways. What about God would be important for unbelievers to understand so that they would be converted to the Lord (vv. 1-9 may be helpful)? David gives us several important characteristics of God that he clung to in repentance. God forgives, cleanses, and renews. He is a merciful God and will forgive according to His lovingkindness and tender mercies, even though we are wretched, poor, and blind.

Results of Renewal (51:13–17)

David eagerly desires to help others by teaching them about God, leading them to the knowledge of being restored to the Lord. David's infectious faith in God is what drives him to help other sinners who feel like they are beyond God's forgiveness. David is also encouraged to praise the Lord and His righteousness from a pure heart again. God is worthy of our worship, and He views our brokenness over our sin and our worship from a repentant heart as a pleasing sacrifice.

Question: Verse 17 talks about a broken spirit and a contrite heart. How would you define this description of repentance if you were teaching it to someone else? What analogies might you use to describe this concept? The psalmist is talking about the opposite of the heart that drove him to sin. He is no longer relying on his own desires to drive him. Spiritual humility. Various analogies could be employed – training a horse requires them to be broken before learning how to obey the trainer, for instance.

Fruits of Repentance (51:18-19)

The final two verses are similar to the Lord's prayer as a calling for God's will to be done here as it is in Heaven. Through the repentance of the nation and the cleansing of their hearts, they will once again worship the Lord as a people in the purity of their hearts.

Consider what you might need to change when you repent of your sin. Be prepared to once again be cleansed and renewed in your relationship with the Lord. When He causes you to rejoice in Him when you dwell on the truth of His tender mercies towards you, what songs of worship do you enjoy singing to the Lord?

Discussion

- 1) When you think about the entire psalm, how is David's prayer of repentance different from many apologies that are given today? David admits to sin rather than apologizing for how God perceived his sin. David embraces his responsibility rather than explaining how his background, influences, or even Bathsheba contributed to the sin.
- 2) Verses 16, 17, and 19 all talk about sacrifice. How do you balance the fact that God does not delight in sacrifice (vv. 16–17) but His blessing results in people sacrificing (v. 19)? God is more interested in the heart, but He wants the heart to display itself in actions. What we do on the outside (sacrifice) matters to God only if our inside (heart) is right with him.

11/11 | Psalm 15

Dr. Andrew Goodwill

*You must follow God's clear instructions
for what honors Him.*



Hidden expectations lead to frustration and failure. How frustrating it would be if a teacher assigned a midterm project that was necessary to pass the class but failed to put the assignment in the syllabus or tell the class about it! It is bad enough when you forget an assignment as a student but much worse if you never knew about it.

Question: What other things in life would lead to frustration or failure if you did not know the expectations? Icebreaker question.
Ideas: speeding tickets when no limit signs are posted; phone bill if no bill sent; wedding attendance when no one sent an invitation; work requirements when you were not put on the schedule

Observation: In Psalm 15, David asks a question of God: who is allowed to approach you in worship (15:1)? In other words, what do you, O God, expect of someone who is entering your presence? Use the QR code to look at a summary of the psalm's flow of thought before reading the psalm and answering this question.

Why do you think it is significant that David addressed his question to God? The answers do not come from man but God. It shifts the focus away from what I might prefer to what God wants.

Lesson: Psalm 15 lists ten unhidden expectations that fall into three categories. If we want close fellowship with God as believers, we do not need to guess what He expects.

First, we must live blamelessly. In verse 2, "upright" describes an integrity or a wholeness to life. Blameless does not mean sinless perfection. A newly blacktopped road—an "upright" road—will still have imperfections, but it will not be readily noticeable. A blameless life is a life without potholes in character and actions. Noah, Job, and David were not sinless but were all described as upright (Gen. 6:9; 2 Sam. 22:24; Job 1:1). Verse 4 gives two practical illustrations of a blameless life. One, the blameless one shows spiritual discernment in their choice

of close friends. They agree with God’s evaluation of the “vile person” or reprobate. They give great weight to friends who reverence God. Two, the blameless one keeps his commitments even if it comes back to hurt him.

You can tell a lot about a person by their close friends.

Question: Describe the types of actions, attitudes, or words a God-fearing friend will have. Acts of service (doing the “one anothers” from the New Testament), displaying the fruit of the Spirit in their attitudes (love, joy, peace...), pushing others to think truth about God

Question: Describe the types of actions, attitudes, or words a God-fearing friend will not have. Doing what pleases them in the moment or acting without self-control, having an attitude that pulls others down (complaining, causing fights), using their words for fleshly things (sexual innuendos, gossip, lies)

The blameless one keeps commitments even if it hurts.

Question: What are some commitments that might seem simple to break in the moment but set a wrong trajectory when broken?

Asking for a sub for work because your friend group decided at the last minute to do something fun; canceling a scheduled time with a friend because you got busy; quitting a ministry opportunity because a “bigger” opportunity came up...

Second, we must do right. “Righteousness” in 15:2 describes meeting the ethical standard that God reveals in His Word. In fact, both illustrations of righteousness in verse 5 are Old Testament Law.

Psalms 15:5	Old Testament Law
“He that putteth not out his money to usury (interest)”	Exodus 22:25 “If thou lend money. . . neither shalt thou lay upon him usury (interest).”
“nor taketh reward (bribe) against the innocent.”	Exodus 23:8 “And thou shalt take no gift (bribe).”

We will not work through how these laws apply to us as New Testament believers. Instead, notice how God describes “righteousness” laws about how we relate to others. If we love God, which is the first great

commandment, we will love our neighbors as ourselves, which is the second great commandment (cf. Matt. 22:37–40). Close fellowship with God (15:1) demands obedience to God in our relationships with others.

Question: Read James 2:14–17. In what ways does James’ teaching connect with the expectation to do right in Psalm 15? In Psalm 15, a close fellowship with God (15:1) looks like loving my neighbor (15:3). In James 2, saving faith in God is always an active faith. The example given in 2:15 sounds like an occasion to love your neighbor as yourself!

Third, we must speak truth (15:2, 3). The phrase “in his heart” provides a location and an implication. In the location of our minds—the Hebrew “heart”—we think what is true. By implication, speaking truth through our mouths is the result of first thinking the truth in our minds. As Jesus said, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34). The verse gives three litmus tests for whether or not we are speaking truth in our hearts. One, the one who speaks truth will not slander or spread damaging gossip about others. Two, the one who speaks truth will not harm his neighbor with his words. “Evil” in 15:3 means calamity or harm. Three, the one who speaks truth will not ridicule or taunt their friends in a cutting way.

Question: What are questions we can ask about our words that will help us know if we are obeying this command to speak truth in our hearts? Do I know if what I am about to say is true (if not, it could be slander)? Even if true, is what I am about to say helpful for the hearer (if not, it could do harm)? Do I want my friends joking like that about me (if not, it may be ridicule instead of a fun joke)?

Discussion

“Be moved” is the Hebrew term for wobble or totter (cf. Isa. 40:20). The close relationship with God described in 15:2–5a brings stability to our wobbling lives. In what ways would meeting the expectations in 15:2–5a lead to stability? A right relationship with God brings blessing and grace to endure (see Psalm 1!). A blameless life will offer simplicity because I make all decisions about God, not my feelings. Practically, speaking truth reduces friend group drama.

11/18 | Escaping Ingratitude

Dr. Andrew Goodwill | Psalm 136:1–4

Ingratitude is like the carbon monoxide of sin: silent but deadly. It is hard to detect until it is too late. It starts as a sin of omission—not remembering God’s goodness and giving thanks—before leading to sins of commission. For example, we complain because we have already ceased to give thanks (cf. 1 Cor. 10:10), or we are angry with each other only when we cease to give thanks for the forgiveness Christ gives (Eph. 4:31–32).

How Bad is Ingratitude?

Although ingratitude may not rank high on some people’s list of horrible sins against God, ingratitude is a wicked sin that leads to more sin. Think about Israel in the wilderness. They complained about not having water (Ex. 15:24; 17:3) and lacking food they liked (16:3–8). God sent fire on the outskirts of their camp when they complained (Num. 11:1) and later when Korah led a rebellion started by complaining (16:41–45). God called their ingratitude what it was: evil (14:27).

The New Testament agrees with the Old by calling ingratitude a wicked sin. In Romans 1:21, the reprobate sinners are guilty of not honoring God and not giving thanks to Him. In 2 Timothy 3:1–2, ingratitude is a mark of apostasy in the last days. Ingratitude is a wicked sin.

Question: Why do you think ingratitude seems like a more acceptable sin in our current Christian culture? It is a sin of omission (not giving thanks); we tend to be very entitled, which goes hand-in-hand with ingratitude. Our culture is very individualistic.

What Fuels Ingratitude?

A wrong view of God enables our ingratitude. Read Psalm 136:1–4 if you have not already. What is true of our God? One, He is good. There is nothing that He could do to improve upon Himself. Just as creation was perfect in its design and execution (cf. Gen. 1:4ff), God is perfect in His being. Two, He is above all. He is the “God of gods” and “Lord of lords.” You cannot get bigger or better than God. Three, He is loving. The psalm repeats “mercy” or steadfast love after each statement about God to emphasize His relationship and reliability. Four, He alone does great things. There is no one else with the power and wisdom necessary. A

right view of God makes obedience to “give thanks” easy. In addition, a right view of God also gives us a right view of ourselves as sinful creatures saved by our wonderful God.

Question: What are some common wrong views of God that can lead to ingratitude? God is powerful but not good; God is a stern Father waiting for us to mess up; God does not really have my best interest in mind; God’s wisdom cannot know what is actually good and right for me.

What is the Solution?

The Gospel is the answer. The Gospel not only leads us to salvation but also gives us the ultimate reason to be thankful. Gratitude and the gospel are inseparable. The living sacrifice of Romans 12:1–2 is the fruit of a grateful heart for the mercies of God described in Romans 1–11. Paul expects the believer to abound in thanksgiving because of their salvation (Col. 2:6–7). The chains of ingratitude fall away when we understand that all that we have and all that we need comes only because God sent Jesus to save us.

Activity: Let’s meditate on the Gospel. Spend 2–3 minutes making a list of what God did in saving you, what God saved you from, or what you now have in salvation. Be ready to share a few thoughts at the end.

What Now?

Thanksgiving Break is a great time to rest, relax, and (shocker) give thanks. As redeemed saints destined for an indescribable eternity (cf. 1 Pet. 1:8), we have more reasons to give thanks than this world. It is good to express thanks for others around us, but it is better to center our thanksgiving on the God Who has given us all things, including those around us. In doing so, we take an important step in escaping ingratitude.

Discussion

- 1) What are some practical ideas that will help you give thanks to God over the Thanksgiving break? Determine to spend extra time in His Word over break; challenge yourself to write a list of good gifts given to you by God and set the number high (20, 50, 100...); memorize Psalm 136:1–4 over break; give a God-centered testimony of thanks if your church has a Thanksgiving testimony time.
- 2) What are some natural roadblocks to being grateful during Thanksgiving break? We come into break wanting rest, but our family wants us to help (note: the roadblock is us... not our family); we are returning to a hard home situation or complicated relationship with relatives we will see.

Leader: If you have extra time, consider having a praise and testimony time with your group.

12/2 | Psalm 13

Dr. Andrew Goodwill



*When you are overwhelmed, you must cry out
to God and choose to trust Him.*

Observation: Use the QR code to learn more about the prayer of lament pattern. Using this pattern, how would you divide Psalm 13 into sections? Note: “turn to God” and “complaint” are intermixed.

Answer: 13:1–2 = turn to God and complaint → 13:3–4 = request → 13:5–6 = trust

Lesson: Life in a sin-cursed world is messy and hard. Sometimes, this reality may not be as noticeable, but all of us will experience times when the messiness and hardship lead to overwhelming discouragement. What do we do when the sorrows of life overwhelm?

When life overwhelms, share your feelings with God (13:1–2; Turn to God / Complaint). David makes four “how long” statements (13:1–2). One, he felt like God ignored him (13:1b). The all-knowing God cannot forget but can seem to be focused on other things from our perspective. Two, David felt like God was hiding (13:1b), which made it seem like God was against him. Three, David dealt with deep frustration (13:2a). “Take counsel in my soul” means that David was trying to figure out the situation by himself. He felt completely isolated from God. Four, David felt like his enemies were victorious against him (13:2b). How long, God, will you let all this happen? It feels like eternity (“forever,” 13:1). The overwhelming feelings expressed in verses 1–2 left David in agony (“sorrow,” 13:2).

Question: Let’s consider the level of agony or sorrow David felt by looking at another use of that same Hebrew word: Genesis 42:38. What is the sorrowful situation in that passage? In what ways does that reference help us understand what David felt in Psalm 13? In Genesis 42, Jacob thought the loss of Benjamin would make the rest of his life completely unbearable.

When life overwhelms, ask God to work (13:3–4; Request). David made a passionate plea to God by using two imperatives in verse 3. “Consider”

means to gaze. “Hear” in the KJV is better translated as “answer.” Having just complained about God ignoring and hiding, David cries out, “Please look at me carefully and answer me!” To lighten the eyes means to restore energy and vitality to a person (cf. Psalm 38:10). Think of the difference between a college student’s eyes after a project due date all-nighter and their eyes at the end of a Christmas break. David gives two results of what would happen if God did not act. He would die (“sleep the sleep of death”), and his enemies would rejoice in their victory.

Question: How are David’s three requests—consider, answer, restore—different than how we might pray? We sometimes pray for specific outcomes that we think would be best. David’s requests are general requests for God to work. He simply asks for God’s involvement rather than a specific outcome. God’s involvement in the situation seems to be more important to David than God working in a specific way.

When life overwhelms, determine to trust God (13:5–6; Trust). The end of all Biblical lament is trust expressed through praise! We can find three important details in the first line of verse 5.

- “But I” in verse 5 shows an emphatic contrast from the complaints of verses 1–2.
- “Have trusted” is the first true past tense verb in the psalm (in Hebrew and English). Despite his complaint and even though God had yet to answer, David had already chosen to trust God.
- “Mercy” is God’s steadfast love (*hesed*). David trusted God because he believed what Paul would write a thousand years later: nothing “shall be able to separate us from the love of God” (Rom. 8:28–29).

When life completely overwhelms, (1) turn to God, (2) give your anxiety to God, (3) ask of God, and (4) trust God.

Question: In a word or a phrase, how would you describe the change from “how long” in verses 1–2 to rejoice/sing in verses 5–6? Ideas: dramatic, opposite, completely opposite, expectant (God had yet to work), reversed...

Discussion

- 1) If you were to redo the lament pattern to fit how many 21st-century Christians handle (often unbiblically) times of deep discouragement, what would the new pattern be? Vent on social media, eat ice cream, gather friends to sympathize and cheer, go to the doctor to get a pill to mask the true symptoms, doubt God, start praying, stop praying because it does not seem to work, look for a different “quick fix”
- 2) In what ways does David’s situation and request to enlighten the eyes (see lesson explanation) parallel what Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9–10? Paul was struggling with something long-term. He turned to God, but God’s answer was grace in the situation, not removal of the situation. The “enlighten” of Psalm 13 is the Old Testament enabling grace of God. Paul then chose to trust.
- 3) Times of deep discouragement in life will come. It is part of living in a sin-cursed world. What practical steps can you make a habit now so that you respond like David in coming discouragements? One, study and meditate on the steadfast love of God (memorize key verses, sing songs about his love, journal through a book noting the character of God). Two, learn to take any level of anxiety directly to God before taking it to others (pray first about your upcoming assignments rather than just asking for prayer). Three, develop godly contentment with how God answers your prayer (be God-centric in your requests rather than outcome-centric; journal your answers to prayer).

12/9 | Our Triumphant Priest-King

Dr. David Saxon | Psalm 110

When the apostles reflected on the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Old Testament passage that they turned to most often (even more than Isaiah 53) was Psalm 110 (over 25 times in the NT). Of course, they learned to do this from Jesus Himself, Who used this passage to prod the Jewish religious leaders to have a bigger view of Messiah than they had. Jews expected—and still expect—a human Messiah, an emissary from God. But Psalm 110, as interpreted by Christ Himself, shows that the Messiah would not just be a return of King David; He would be David's Lord. He would be the Son of God incarnate (Matt. 22:41-45).

Most of the royal psalms, such as 2, 45, 72, 89, and 132, have dual reference to a historic king of Israel, such as David or Solomon, and to the future Messiah. Psalm 110 is unique in that David (Jesus tells us the author was David) does not describe himself at all; this psalm is strictly a prophecy about the coming Messiah. Indeed, this psalm contains elements that did not apply to any human king of Israel before Christ came. Perhaps that's why Matthew, Mark, Luke, Peter (in Acts), Stephen, Paul, and the writer of Hebrews all utilize this psalm to describe the ministry of Christ.

Read Psalm 110:1 | What do we learn about Messiah in this psalm?

First, Yahweh invites Him to sit at His right hand, the place of victory and authority. And yet He is sitting at God's right hand "until" His enemies are finally subdued. NT authors see both victory already achieved and final victory to be achieved in this statement. Christ's death, resurrection, ascension, and session defeated sin, death, and Satan once for all. He has the title deed to the earth firmly in His hands, and He has accomplished the rescue of His people from all their enemies (Rev. 5). Nevertheless, there is a mopping-up operation underway that will culminate in the final overthrow of every enemy of God's people. In short, the triumphs of the first and second comings of the Messiah are implications of verse 1, and NT authors quote this verse to refer to both.

Read 110:2–3, 5–7 | Verses 2–3 and 5-7 expand this motif of the conquering Messiah. He will "send the rod of [his] strength," which pictures the king's victorious scepter stretched out over His enemies (v.

2); Messiah's troops gladly volunteer themselves in verse 3, arrayed in holy garments and marching forth to conquer alongside their king, who glows with the freshness of youth (like dew in the morning); with Yahweh at His side, in verses 5-6 Messiah will crush His enemies (shattering kings reminds us of Psalm 2, and scattering corpses points to Armageddon and its aftermath); the psalm ends with assurance that Messiah, far from being exhausted by His exploits, drinks from a refreshing stream and lifts His head in triumph. While some of the details of these verses are very difficult, the overall picture of a conquering warrior is unmistakable.

Read Psalm 110:4 | The surprising feature of this psalm is its centerpiece, about which the warrior motif swirls. Messiah, David prophesies, will be a priest, but not a Levitical priest. With priests coming from Levi and kings coming from Judah, no king of Israel could ever be a king-priest (in fact, it was illicit for a king to intrude on the priest's office). But this king will be a priest, which necessitates a different order of priesthood: the order of Melchizedek. The author of Hebrews devotes several chapters to developing this theme (5:5-10; 7:1-28). In order for this king to conquer, He must offer a sacrifice, He must inaugurate a new covenant, and He must usher His people into the presence of Yahweh. He must be a priest.

David prophesies of this remarkable development, and Jesus Christ—our great priest-king—fulfills it. In His first coming, He conquered His enemies (and ours) through His sacrifice on our behalf. He now exercises His priesthood at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us. One day, He will return and crush all those still in opposition to His rule and establish His kingdom on this earth.

As we celebrate the birth of Christ in a few weeks, let us glorify Him for being the long-awaited King in the line of David and for being the unique Priest Who conquers by sacrifice, Who “suffered the just for the unjust to bring us to God” (1 Pet. 3:18).

Discussion

- 1) What are specific ways you and I can be encouraged by the truth that Christ is reigning until God puts all enemies under His feet? What enemies do you have? I do not need to fret that the enemies of God are ruling now because I know their end; this can bring comfort and encourage my obedience now. Types of enemies: anyone who is trying to push me away from God (friend, family, other) is an enemy; in a workplace, coworkers might be enemies as they try to sabotage our reputation because we are Christians.
- 2) Why do you and I need a priest? What is Christ doing for us right now? Read Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25 before answering. We need an intercessor before God; Jesus is our eternal intercessor.
- 3) In what ways does Christ as our Priest-King give us a different perspective about the Christmas story, especially when you think about how the world talks about the Christmas story? The incarnation was about God's love, but it always points to God's rule; our world likes to emphasize love and peace, but as Psalm 110 notes, the rule of the Priest-King includes conquering and judgment.

1/27 | Psalm 23

Dr. Andrew Goodwill

You can find complete satisfaction in God's steadfast love and goodness.

What does the number 532 have to do with Psalm 23? Answer: it is the number of Psalm 23 sermons posted to Sermon Audio in 2025. That is more than any of the other “popular” psalms: Psalm 1 (399), Psalm 8 (228), Psalm 51 (394), Psalm 139 (302). Implication: Psalm 23 is likely the most well-known psalm across American churches, if not in the world. It's like the John 3:16 of the Old Testament, although I doubt Hebrew athletes were painting the reference on their faces. When we are familiar with a psalm, it can be easy to overlook what the text says and instead talk about what people have told us about the psalm. Let's be careful to ask of Psalm 23, “But what does the Bible say?”

Psalm 23 divides into three sections, each with a different setting. Verses 1–4 occur in the pasture as David considers Yahweh as Shepherd. Verse 5 moves to the banquet hall as David considers Yahweh as Host. Finally, David brings the psalm back to his own setting as he states his conclusion in verse 6. To summarize the psalm's message: Yahweh as our Shepherd and Host provides all we need through His goodness and steadfast love (“mercy” in 23:6). Let's explore the truths from Psalm 23 that support this message.

First, God provides abundantly as our Shepherd (23:1–4). “Want” in 23:1 means to lack nothing. Deuteronomy 2:7 uses this same word when recounting how Israel “lacked” nothing in the Wilderness. Elijah promised the widow of Zarephath that her oil and flour would not “lack” during the drought (1 Kgs. 17:14, 16).

Question: How do these two cross references help us better understand what Psalm 23 means about lacking nothing? Israel and the widow may have desired other things but had what they needed. Lacking nothing really means lacking any necessity. In other words, all that I need is found in God.

David focuses his explanation on the Shepherd's spiritual blessings.

- God nourishes His sheep by providing them rest and sustenance (23:2, “green pastures” and “still waters”).

- God gives enabling grace to His sheep (23:3a). To restore the “soul” in Hebrew refers to empowering the whole person. God revitalizes or enables you so that you can walk in His ways (23:3b, “paths of righteousness”).
- God comforts through the darkest times imaginable (23:4). “Shadow of death” translates a single word that means utter darkness or death-like darkness (cf. Job 10:22). It describes a hopeless location that ought to shake us to the core. God’s shepherd-presence and readiness (“rod and staff”) provide comfort despite the darkest times imaginable. Isaiah 9:2 uses this word to describe the Messiah's ministry to sinful and hopeless people (cf. Matt. 4:16).

Question: In your mind, what do you think could fall into the category of “darkest times imaginable”? Personal cancer diagnosis, family ripped apart through divorce or conflict, death of a younger sibling or parent, closed door to the future (dropped from academic program, not able to join military because of health...), natural disaster that ruins you financially

Question: What truths about God from verses 1–4 or other passages can provide comfort in those darkest imaginable times? (1) God gives grace to endure and do right [23:3; 2 Cor. 12:9-10]; (2) God is right there with me through trials (23:4; Heb. 13:5). (3) God must be one Source of true nourishment (23:2; Matt. 11:28).

Second, God protects securely as our Host (23:5). How secure did David feel with God? Secure enough to lay down his weapons and sit down to eat even though his enemies were there. David trusted his Host completely for his protection. The last two descriptors of the oil and cup show the great privilege of sitting down at Yahweh’s table. Ecclesiastes 9:7–8 uses “head anointed with oil” to describe the joys of life. A cup running over shows the abundance and complete satisfaction of having God as your Host. When you are with God, there is no fear, only confidence; no lack, only plenty; and no sadness, only joy.

Question: Let’s explore the feeling that David expresses in 23:5. What situations or events of life come closest to these words: confidence, plenty, and joy? Thanksgiving, surrounded by friends and family; weddings, graduation, finishing a multi-year project.

Third, God cares personally (23:6). David concludes with an emphatic word (“surely”). If David were speaking these words to us, he could have replaced the word “surely” with an amazed exhale like “haaah.”

Goodness refers to the complete perfection of God’s character, and mercy is God’s steadfast love (*hesed*). The common translation of “follow” does not do justice to the verb. The verb means to pursue—as in pursuing an enemy (e.g., Gen. 14:15). God’s perfect character and steadfast love are going to hunt David down all the days of his life. They are inescapable and undeterrable, which is a good thing! Those who are pursued by God’s goodness and steadfast love enjoy the presence of God both now and forever (23:6b). Truly, they lack nothing.

Discussion

- 1) What are things that might stop us from agreeing wholeheartedly with “I shall not want” in 23:1? Selfishness because I confuse my desires with my needs; generally confusing what it means to lack nothing and thinking only of physical rather than spiritual things; unconfessed sin means my relationship that brings satisfaction is currently harmed; past experiences when we were disappointed in what God allowed to happen (similar to confusing my desired outcomes with what God thinks I need)
- 2) How could the truths from Psalm 23 change what you think, feel, say, or do the rest of this week? I must meditate during my devotional times on what my passage says about God (think); I must choose to be joyful in my God rather than let ruined plans with friends affect my attitude; I can be quick to talk about my God to my classmates; I can pray for God’s grace to help me do right.

2/3 | Psalm 53

Dr. Andrew Goodwill



Seek God because the world is not your friend.

Observation: Psalm 53, which is nearly identical to Psalm 14, gives several characteristics of the fool. Psalms and Proverbs provide a greater picture of the fool, especially in their comparison of the wise, simple, fool, and scorner. Use the QR code to see this comparison and then answer these questions:

- 1) How would you describe the difference between the simple, the fool, and the scorner? The simple is passive. They cave to peer pressure and are followers. The scorner is active. They seem to get delight out of causing issues and harm. They are vehemently opposed to God. In contrast, the fool is self-centered. They do not think about God or others but act for their own benefit and desires.
- 2) Read Psalm 53 and come up with a list of descriptors for the fool before working through the lesson. Practical atheist, sinful, not good, do not seek God, do not pray (call in 53:4), fight against God's people.

Lesson: Timothy Sutton robbed me. Well, he did not really rob me, but he did convince eight-year-old me that I should give him \$10 from my birthday money... and my cowboy boots. His arguments: my remaining money could still be a lot of candy, and I did not really need my cowboy boots. Made sense to me! After all, would a “friend” ever try to trick me? It all worked out in the end. Timothy’s mom was suspicious of his story and made him return the loot. Plus, Timothy was saved a few years later and now has a far better treasure awaiting him. I also learned a lesson. Not all who claim to be friends are truly my friends.

According to Psalm 53, the world is anything but a true friend to God’s people. The psalm may start with a focus on an individual (“the fool”) but moves to a group, “they” in 53:1–5. This group of fools deny God’s existence mentally in what they believe or practically in how they live. The fool is the ungodly world. How do we know this? One, God looks down on the “children of men” in verse 2, not just on the children of Israel. He is evaluating all the people of the earth. Two, the primary

characteristic of the fool is the same as the world: sin. Third, Paul applies 53:1–3 in Romans 3:10–12 when talking about the sinfulness of everyone in the world. The unsaved world is the fool of Psalm 53 who rejects God.

Question: “There is none that doeth good” appears twice (53:1, 3). How do passages like Isaiah 64:6, Romans 3:23–24, and Titus 3:5 help us understand what that means? All three references show the insufficiency of our “good” deeds in gaining God’s pleasure or our salvation. Romans 2:13 says the Gentiles accidentally obeyed God’s law at times. “None good” means that God has one verdict for the fool: guilty.

Having defined the fool as the ungodly world, David describes the fool’s harm, the fool’s end, and the believer’s hope. First, the world by its very nature seeks to harm God’s people (53:4). Sinners have no true knowledge of God, nor do they pray to God. In fact, they seek to consume God’s people as thoughtlessly as one eats a piece of bread. The world is not our friend.

Question: How should the warning about the world’s harm change the way we think and act? I should be very slow and cautious when the world comes up with something new and declares it to be good or harmless. I should approach closer relationships with unbelievers cautiously because their entire worldview is different than mine (no God vs. yes God). Entertainment declared “safe” by this world may not be safe for me.

Second, the world will be judged for their sin (53:5). They have no stability. Like the wicked of Psalm 1 who are blown like chaff, the foolish of Psalm 53 are scared when there is nothing to be scared about. God will defend His people from their enemies (aka., the ungodly world). You/thee in verse 5 refers to God’s people of Israel, but the ultimate fulfillment of this prophesied victory is in Revelation 19.

Third, our hope must come from God’s deliverance (53:6). Israel’s hope for deliverance from the ungodly world around her was only in God, just as our hope is only in God. Our joy and satisfaction come as we see God work on our behalf.

Discussion

- 1) Although Psalm 53 uses “fool” to describe the world, in what ways can a believer sometimes live as a practical atheist like the fool? We can refuse to read God’s word; when making a decision, we never think about what would glorify God; we know what God wants us to do but choose to ignore His commands as if He did not exist.
- 2) Read Ephesians 5:15. In what ways might this command summarize our response to Psalm 53? As a believer, I need to live carefully. Wisdom dictates that I think and act with caution because it is easy to misstep.
- 3) We live in the world and must interact with the world. What are some safeguards that a believer could set up to avoid becoming too friendly with the world? Ask “how does this help me” rather than “what is wrong with this”; Ask yourself the Philippians 4:8 questions before digesting media; stay connected to a local church that holds you accountable.

2/10 | God's Unfailing Love

Dr. David Saxon | Psalm 136

As the only infinite, sovereign Being in the universe, God cannot be put under obligation by anyone or anything outside Himself. He is the only completely free Person in existence.

It's amazing, then, to read the Bible's storyline and discover that God delights in making covenants with people. He binds Himself with promises, many of them unilateral, depending on nothing but His own decision. Not only that, but He makes these promises to sinners, people who have no claim on Him and actually deserve judgment and wrath. Making and keeping promises to sinful people shows how loving God is, how utterly unselfish and generous He is.

There is a word used about 250 times in the OT that describes this beautiful characteristic of God: it is the word *hesed*. It's a very difficult word to render in other languages, including English, because a complex of ideas is expressed by it. It's usually translated "mercy" or "lovingkindness" in the KJV. Other translations use a variety of words to translate this term. Some of the better attempts include "steadfast love" (ESV) and "unfailing love" (NIV). One important Bible encyclopedia defines it this way: "The principal connotation of *hesed* is 'loyal love'—a love which is associated with the covenant ... Men could always rely upon the divine *hesed*" (ZPEB, 3:997).

Not surprisingly, over half of the uses of this word occur in Psalms (127x). Sixteen times, *hesed* is paired with a Hebrew word that means "faithfulness." It's easy to see how the two ideas mesh. In being loyal to His covenant obligations, God is faithful to His covenant partners. Psalm 100:5 is one of these pairings: "For the Lord is good; his mercy [*hesed*] is everlasting; and his truth [faithfulness] endureth to all generations." The psalmists delight in talking about the unfailing love of Yahweh, Whom they can absolutely count on in every situation.

Several psalms speak of Yahweh's *hesed* in the context of deliverance from enemies. For example, Psalm 57:3 says, "He [Yahweh] shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up. Selah. God shall send forth his mercy [*hesed*] and his truth [faithfulness]." God's people learned to ask for help on the basis of

Yahweh's *hesed*: "Make thy face to shine upon thy servant: save me for thy mercies' [*hesed*] sake" (Psalm 31:16). In other words, "Lord, you have chosen me as your servant and promised to care for me. I'm in trouble right now; please keep your promise!" Five times in Psalms, psalmists use the word *trust* in connection with Yahweh's *hesed*.

God does keep His promises, and a major theme in Psalms is God's people praising Him for His unfailing love. Psalm 63:3: "Because thy lovingkindness [*hesed*] is better than life, my lips shall praise thee," and Psalm 106:1: "Praise ye the Lord. O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy [*hesed*] endureth for ever" are typical examples.

What promises has God made to you? What has God done to guarantee the fulfillment of His promises (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20)? Are we responding with trust and praise?

Discussion

- 1) Read Psalm 136, in which *hesed* occurs in every verse. How is Israel's history grounded in this characteristic of God? The psalmist sees God's creative and redemptive acts as coming from God's steadfast love. Israel's existence and identity depended on God keeping His promises.
- 2) How does faithfulness/reliability demonstrate love? Love is something that endures (cf. 1 Cor. 13). Compassion, sympathy, and personal interest may wane as time goes on, but those who truly love you will stay with you no matter what.
- 3) What are some of the promises God has made to you that give you great comfort, especially when you remember that "His steadfast love endures forever"?

Activity: The refrain in Psalm 136 forces the reader to slow down and contemplate God’s steadfast love. Let’s do that now together by writing our own mini-Psalm 136. Take a few minutes to privately fill out the following with examples of God’s love in your life before sharing some with the group. Example:

He burdened my mom to share the gospel
with me the night I was saved

*for His steadfast love
endures forever*

I will give thanks unto God, for He is good.

*for His steadfast love
endures forever*

*for His steadfast love
endures forever*

*for His steadfast love
endures forever*

*for His steadfast love
endures forever*

*for His steadfast love
endures forever*

*for His steadfast love
endures forever*

**O give thanks unto the God of heaven:
for His steadfast love endures forever.**

Leaders, try to get each person in your group to give 2–3 statements.

2/17 | Psalm 61

Dr. Andrew Goodwill

You can pray because God is near.



Observations: Psalm 61 divides into four sections. Read the psalm together and then walk through the section summaries using the QR code before answering a few questions.

- 1) What details from the text hint at God's nearness to David? Leading in verse 2; prior shelter and strong tower in verse 3; abiding in tabernacle (61:4); hiding under God's wings (61:4); hearing past vows (61:5); abiding before God (61:7).
- 2) Verse 4 talks about taking refuge under God's wings. How do passages like Deuteronomy 32:11 and Matthew 23:37 help explain the imagery? Deuteronomy describes protecting its young by hovering over the nest or carrying them to safety. Matthew describes a hen sheltering her chicks. The image implies more than a place of safety (like a rock) by including a relational element. Eagles and hens care for their own.

Lesson: Do you ever change your actions because someone specific is near? We all do it in one way or another. We exaggerate one of our interests because that friend has it too. We tone down the joking because a stern-looking teacher rounds the corner. We eat a meal with good manners because grandma is visiting. Psalm 61 teaches us that God is near and how God's nearness should affect our actions. When you are overwhelmed by trials and life, the message of this psalm is for you: God is near, which makes a difference.

First, because God is near, He hears our prayer (61:1, 2, 5). David had a sense of urgency to his prayer because he used commands in verses 1–2. It is a passionate cry for help rather than a polite “would you be so kind if it is not too much trouble.” “Cry” in verse 1 describes moaning. Have you ever experienced that inward moan because something is not right in your spirit? This is where David is.

David also had a sense of confidence in his prayer. He believed God would hear even if he prayed from the end of the earth (61:2). This “end” could imply David felt a great divide between his prayer and God.

Isn't that true of our prayers at times? However, David later declares emphatically, "For you yourself, O God, have heard" (61:5). There is no stronger way that this could be put in the Hebrew. No matter how distant we feel from God, God hears our prayers because He is near!

Question: David's emotions come out in Psalm 61, but sometimes our emotions and feelings can keep us from praying too. What different emotions or feelings can keep us from praying, and why does each keep us from praying? Feeling completely alone may cause me to think God will not hear me; anger over the situation may make me stubborn and not want to talk to God; pride in my abilities may make me think prayer is a last-ditch effort that I do not need now.

Second, because God is near, He provides us safety (61:2–4). David calls our God a high rock (61:2), a sheltering refuge (61:3), and a strong tower (61:3). He prays that God would lead him to safety. "Lead" is an unusual term but is the same word that appears in Psalm 23—"lead me in the path of righteousness." "Rock that is higher than I" shows that David understood his limitations. No matter how overwhelmed we may be, God provides the safety because He is near!

Question: David knew his limitations and turned to God. How do David's words in 61:2 relate to 1 Peter 5:6–7? David had the humility to turn to God and pray; Peter tells NT believers to do the same thing. God's nearness to us means nothing if we will not turn humbly to Him!

Third, because God is near, He provides stability (61:4, 7). In 61:4, David requests to sojourn forever in God's tabernacle. He had utmost confidence that God would make the king, David himself, "dwell before God forever." After David prayed, he meditated on God's promises to him in the Davidic covenant and concluded that God would keep them.

God's steadfast love and faithfulness are the foundation for why He hears our prayers, why he provides safety, and why he provides us stability. Nearness means nothing without steadfast love and faithfulness, which is why David reminds God of these things in verse 7. We can rely on God and trust that He will be near because He loves us and is faithful to us. No wonder David responds with praise.

Discussion

- 1) Which one of the images of God—rock, shelter, strong tower, and wing—stands out to you the most? Make sure you explain why.
- 2) What are a handful of overwhelming situations that someone in this small group may face in the next month? Physical injury that makes campus life hard, difficult situations back home that you cannot do anything about, end of a dating relationship, suicide of a high school friend
- 3) In what ways could the truth from Psalm 61 (God is near) change how someone works through one of those overwhelming issues? (1) Even though God may feel distant (“from the end of the earth”), I still pray, (2) I make sure that I recall past answers to prayer, (3) I choose to praise God even though the situation may not be resolved.

2/24 | Psalm 100

Dr. Andrew Goodwill



*You must praise God because He is good,
loving, and faithful.*

Observations: How many different ways can you use the word *good*? Before going to the QR code, how many different uses for the word *good* can you list in one minute?

After reading through the handout, ask yourself the following questions.

- 1) In what ways does the handout's definition of "God is good" differ from the way people may talk about God's goodness? The Bible makes God's goodness an objective reality rather than a subjective feeling; our world defines goodness more like niceness; our world defines good based on feelings.
- 2) If you were to simplify the definition to teach it to a younger child, how would you define "God is good"? You can always trust God because He is Who He is; God cannot grow or change because he is already perfect; God cannot make a bad choice or decision—ever.

Lesson: Have you ever been involved in a question-and-answer battle with a toddler? No matter how many times you answer their why-questions, there is always another one coming! Psalm 100 gives seven commands across four verses and answers the why-question in just three simple words: because God is good.

The psalmist highlights two manifestations of God's goodness for special meditation (1:5). One, God is steadfast in His love (KJV: "mercy"). God is good—He is always loving all the time ("everlasting"). If He were ever not to be loving, He would cease to be good. Two, God is faithful (KJV: "truth"). Steadfast love and faithfulness are connected to each other (remember what Dr. Saxon mentioned a few weeks ago). No matter where or when you live, God is always the same level of goodness. Every generation of His people can trust Him.

Question: Verse 5 gives a powerful statement about God's goodness based on His steadfast love and faithfulness. What are common reasons that believers may struggle to embrace this truth? When we

hurt physically (like Job), we can get too focused on our condition that we miss God; when our “good” plans need to change, and we do not understand why, we can doubt God’s faithfulness; when we do not get what we really want, we can doubt God’s goodness because we do not feel like He is loving.

How should we respond because God is good? Let’s jump back to the beginning and look at the seven commands. Notice that the whole “earth” is commanded, not just Israel (100:1). Each of the commands is plural. Psalm 100 calls every person to rightly respond to the God Who is good. No one is exempt.

The seven commands have a lot of overlap, but there are three big ideas that weave through the commands. First, a right response to God’s goodness begins with acknowledging that Yahweh is God (100:3). “Know” in verse 3 means to acknowledge, which is more than just information. To acknowledge Yahweh as God is to proclaim Him as creator (“he that has made us”), owner (“we are his sheep”), and provider (“sheep of his pasture”). We owe our existence and our sustenance to him.

Second, a right response to God’s goodness demands public worship of Him (100:1, 2, 4). “Make a joyful noise” describes a victorious battle cry (cf. Jdg. 7:21; 1 Sam. 17:52) which in context is like “singing” joyfully in verse 2. These are not quiet times of meditation but enthusiastic moments of praise and thanksgiving together through song (100:4). In our worship, we recount what He has done for us in addition to praising Who He is. “His praise,” “courts,” and “name” show that our public worship is all about Him.

Question: In what ways does Psalm 100 paint a different picture of public worship than might be in some of our churches? There is excitement in the Psalm 100 worship (note: the excitement is based on “God is good” and not atmosphere or music style); It is God-centric rather than driven by preferences or personal opinions; it is based on personal things (thanksgiving) and character of God (praise) rather than one or another (note: there needs to be a balance between sentimental thanksgiving and objective praise).

Third, a right response to God's goodness includes worshipful acts of service to Him (100:2). The verb "to serve" is paired with worship throughout the Old Testament (e.g., Deut. 5:9; 6:13). Practical and willing acts of obedience are a natural result of right worship. Because God is good, all people must acknowledge Him as God, which demands public worship and personal obedience.

Discussion

- 1) In a way, Psalm 100 is evangelistic ("earth," 100:1). How would you describe the relationship between Psalm 100 and Matthew 28:18–20? In our dispensation, sharing the gospel and discipling converts is the prerequisite to "all the earth" worshiping God. If worship is the right response to God's goodness, evangelism is also a response to God's goodness (cf. 2 Cor. 5:14).
- 2) A worshipful act of service ("service," 100:2) is something done for God because of God. How might that be different than other acts of service? Examples: some acts of service can fall into habit or be based on our friendship with others. These are not bad reasons to serve but fall short.
- 3) What is one thing you can do differently in the next three days that will encourage you to serve God because He is good? Example: keep a journal each day tracking ways that God showed His goodness to you in life or through His Word; pray privately before you do an act of service and thank God for what He has done for you; talk about God's goodness in your friend group and ask them for advice on how to respond to God's goodness.

3/3 | Psalms on Sacrifice

Dr. David Potter

Leaders: spend time reading as many passages in the lesson as time and discussion allow.

What sacrifices does God require of us and why? Why would people want to give from their treasures as sacrifices? At least sixteen psalms reference sacrifice. A study of the psalms can help us answer these and other related questions.

The Psalms were written by and for Old Testament saints. God's people Israel dealt with sin through the incomplete sacrificial system of the Law of Moses, which Christ's sacrifice superseded (Hebrews 9:26). What relevance do the sacrifices mentioned in the Psalms have for New Testament believers?

Breadth of Sacrifices

We should note that dealing with sin is not the only purpose for sacrifices. Sacrifices had many forms and many purposes, such as dealing with the guilt and contamination of sin, dealing with ritual uncleanness, establishing vows, thanks to God, and fellowship with Him. While Christ's sacrifice establishes our relationship to God, sacrifices which we offer are very relevant to our fellowship with God.

Question: According to Hebrews 13:15, what is one of the New Testament sacrifices we give and what is the content of the sacrifice? Sacrifice of praise; the content ("fruit of our lips") is acknowledging or confessing with our words Who God is. We give the sacrifice of praise every time we speak the truth about God to God.

Negative Sacrifices

In Psalm 16:4, David resolves never to offer sacrifices to false deities. Psalm 106:28 and 37-39 give us warning examples of what befell Israel because of their idolatrous practices during the wilderness wanderings.

Positive Sacrifices

Psalms 27:6, 54:6, 96:8, and 107:22 associate sacrifice with joy and praise. In Psalm 119:108, the psalmist asked God to accept "the freewill offerings of [his] mouth."

Question: Read Psalms 116:17 and 141:2. What do those passages identify as sacrifice? In what way(s) are those things sacrifices?

Thanksgiving and prayer are sacrifices. Thanksgiving is a sacrifice in what we are giving to God: the fruit of our lips (cf. Heb. 13:15).

Prayer is a sacrifice as an act done in obedience for Him in addition to praising Him.

In Psalm 66:13-15, the psalmist promises to fulfill his vow to the Lord by offering sacrifices in gratitude for victory over his enemies.

David offers a series of six wishes or prayers at the beginning of Psalm 20 for the well-being of his hearers. The fourth of these (verse 3) is that God will respond to their offerings.

God-Honoring Sacrifices

Asaph in Psalm 50:7-15 speaks for God, saying that He does not need our sacrifices. David says in Psalm 40:6-8 that God prefers obedience to sacrifice.

Finally, in Psalm 51, the great psalm of confession, David asserts that God is interested in sincere repentance rather than sacrifice (vs. 16-17). Ironically, two verses later he says that God will be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness.

Question: How do we resolve the paradox of God not needing or wanting our sacrifices and God requiring sacrifices in the Law and accepting them? They still show His worth even if they do not add to His worth because you cannot get more worthy than He already is! Sacrifices become the outward demonstration of the inward heart.

Discussion

- 1) Our culture does not have the same Canaanite deities that Israel struggled to resist (cf. 106:28). However, what are the false gods in our culture and how do people offer sacrifices to them today? Materialism is a false god; people devote countless hours pursuing stuff; pleasure is a god; people devote their lives to finding the easiest path that makes them feel good.
- 2) In Psalm 4:5, David urges us to offer the sacrifices of righteousness. In this case, "righteousness" describes something aligned with God's

expectations. How does that idea compare to Romans 12:1?

Romans 12:1 talks about our lives as sacrifices that are pleasing to God... aligned with God's expectations. Within my acts of sacrifice and everyday life, God expects me to align with His desires, not my own.

- 3) When you consider all that Psalms says about sacrifice, what are 3–4 big takeaways or principles that we need to accept and seek wisdom to apply? God demands our sacrifice be honoring to Him alone (not to idols). God prioritizes my personal obedience above my acts of worship. God has expectations for my worship.

3/10 | Psalm 121

Dr. Andrew Goodwill



*You can trust God your Keeper at all times
and locations, and in all ways.*

Observations: Songs of Ascent (Psalm 120–134) were pilgrimage psalms sung as Jews made required trips for feasts in Jerusalem. Read through the handout using the QR code and Psalm 121 before answering these questions.

- 1) What practical concerns would pilgrims on these journeys probably have? Safety on the road, protection of farms/houses/loved ones left behind; health and provision on the road.
- 2) How would you describe the relationship between the testimony and encouragement sections of the psalm? There are different ways of saying it, but some of these will work: (1) the second half describes why God's help is a good thing; (2) the first half gives an endorsement of the truth to the group; (3) the psalmist wants to share the truth with others because he realized what it meant for him.

Lesson

Question: What is one thing you are not good at and would rather someone else do for you? Leaders, take time to get a few answers.

I was the number one loser in the concert band for four straight semesters. In other words, I was second chair, which had some perks. I got to play all the fun parts without the soloist's responsibilities. Band life was good until Nathan, the first chair, was gone for an entire week of practice. I was suddenly responsible for playing the solo parts. Disastrous, embarrassing, and humiliating are all appropriate words for how the week went. By Friday's practice, the band director had chosen to practice all the non-trumpet solo songs. In a way, Nathan kept me safe because he covered where I lacked. He was "my helper" Who took on responsibilities that I could not.

That idea of helper—one who does what we cannot do for ourselves—is exactly how the psalmist describes God. Verse 1 is better translated as a question, "from where comes my help?" Answer: God Who made

everything (121:2). The application for this psalm is short and implied: Do the same thing as the psalmist and look up to find your help in God (121:1). There are no commands in this psalm, only invitations. “Why should I look up?” The answer is not “because God told you.” The answer is because your Protector—or “Keeper” as verse 5 calls Him—invites you. What is so special about the protection God gives?

First, your Protector protects attentively (121:3–4). God does not doze off on the job or lose His concentration (“sleep” and “slumber”). Picture a person guiding another alongside a dangerous cliff. Because God protects attentively, He always notices where your foot is and should be. There is no autopilot, dozing, or carelessness with our Protector.

Second, your Protector protects constantly (5–6). “The LORD is your keeper” is the heart and soul of the psalm. You have a Protector Who is the maker of heaven and earth and Who is attentive in His protection. But it gets even better. “Shade” is a poetic way to describe protection, while “on right hand” is the place of prominence. The protection of God is right there by us.

Question: Why do you think verse six mentions the sun and the moon? Sunburn is a thing, but moon burn is not. The sun and moon are not mentioned because they are problems. They are timing markers. If God’s protection is like the shade that is right there by us, His protection would continue day and night.

Third, your Protector protects completely (7–8). God protects physically and emotionally in all situations. “All evil” in verse 7 is every type of calamity. We know that calamities will come in life, but every calamity must go through God to get to us. He protects our “soul,” which is a term in Hebrew that refers to the whole person. He protects in all the activities of life (“going out and going in”). There is no termination date or expiration of warrant to God’s protection of us.

What more encouragement do you need than to look up and recognize that the Maker of all things is the One Who protects you? Because the Lord covers you with His attentive, constant, and complete protection... look up!

Discussion

- 1) No calamity happens to us without it first coming through our Protector. What are some of the calamities of life that may make us wonder why God allowed it? Car wrecks, cancer diagnoses for a younger person, death of a loved one, broken families, financial hardship, change in Spring break or summer plans.
- 2) What are some truths that you must embrace when calamities come into your life? I may never know why God allowed it, but I can believe that He is still in control; hardships often spur my spiritual growth; some hardships come because I am in the middle of God's will (and the world dislikes that); all the calamities in our sin-cursed world are nothing compared to the eternal rest.
- 3) What is one thing about Spring Break—the next “journey” most of you will take—that could be a concern? How could the truth from this Psalm help you deal with the concern?

3/17 | Hosanna!

Dr. David Potter | Psalm 118

Why do we worship on Sunday, and what has that to do with Psalm 118?

Psalm 118 is the last of a group of psalms (113–118) called the “Hallel” (“Praise”). By tradition, these psalms were part of the Jewish celebration of Passover. The Last Supper was a Passover celebration. According to Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26, Jesus and His disciples “sang a hymn” (literally, they “hymned”) before they went out to the Mount of Olives. Psalm 118 was likely the last of the hymns. If so, the last song Jesus sang before He went to the cross was Psalm 118. The New Testament quotes or refers to the last part of this psalm more than a dozen times to help us unpack its meaning.

First, let us get an overview of the psalm. **Read 118:1 and 29.** Notice that the first and last verses are identical. “His mercy (loyal love) endures for ever.” Verses 1 and 29 comprise the main point. Our psalm celebrates God’s mercy and loyalty in verses 1-4 and 29. The psalmist trusts God for deliverance from his enemies based on experience (5-18). Another important theme is salvation (vv. 14, 15, 21, 25).

Consider how this psalm illuminates Passion Week. **Read Matthew 21:9** (repeated in Mark 11:9-10 and Luke 19:38) and compare Psalm 118:25-26. “Save now” in Psalm 118:25 translates the Hebrew “Hosannah.”

Question: When the crowd at the Triumphal entry shouted “Hosanna” (save now), what do you think they were thinking about?

Psalm 118:25 mentions success and prosperity, which could have been their hope; rather than thinking Jesus was coming to save from sin, they could have thought He was coming to save from political and economic oppression of the Romans.

Question: When Jesus heard the crowd’s prayer of “Hosanna” (save now), what do you think He was thinking about? His approaching death on the cross, where He would answer their prayer in the way that they needed.

Read 118:22–24. These verses speak of the rejection of a stone by the builders. The rejected stone becomes the head of the corner. Jesus

applied these verses in the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen (Matt. 21:33-44; Mark 12:1-11; Luke 20:9-18). The quotations from the psalm are in Matthew 21:42, Mark 12:10-11, and Luke 20:17. The parable asserts that the owner of the vineyard (Who represents God the Father) sent his beloved son, and the tenants killed him, foreshadowing the crucifixion.

God delights in reversals. **Read Acts 4:10–12.** After the stone is rejected, it becomes the head of the corner. God does not leave us in doubt about when that event occurred. Peter tells us in his defense before the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:10-12. Peter clearly connects salvation from sin with faith in the crucified and resurrected Cornerstone. The day the rejected stone becomes the head of the corner is the day the Lord has made for us to rejoice and be glad, the day of the resurrection.

Question: In view of the context of Psalm 118 and of Peter's reference to this verse, is "this is the day that the Lord hath made" (118:24) a general reference to every day alike, or to a specific day? "This day" in the context of Psalm 118 and Peter's use refers to the day of our salvation. It seems to be specific to either the day that brought salvation through his death and resurrection or to the day in which we experience that salvation personally.

Discussion

- 1) On Good Friday, we remember Christ's death and burial, but on Easter we remember Christ's resurrection victory. How might Psalm 118:23–29 help guide our attitude on Sunday? Those verses are full of wonder ("marvelous," v. 23), gladness ("rejoice," v. 24), praise (v. 28), and thanksgiving (v. 29). We should seek to have these same attitudes and reactions.
- 2) Considering the joyful focus of our services on Sunday, what are some things you can do to prepare yourself to have the attitudes described in Psalm 118 while in church on Sunday? Go to bed an hour earlier than usual so you are well rested. Wake up earlier, find an extra quiet space, and read the resurrection texts. Go for a walk on Saturday or Sunday morning and listen to hymns of praise about the resurrection and our salvation. Spend special time in prayer praising God for saving you.

3/31 | Psalm 139:1–6

Dr. Andrew Goodwill



God Knows / *You can trust the God Who personally and thoroughly knows you.*

Observation: Read about the structure of Psalm 139 (QR code). In what ways might the psalm give us a pattern for studying God’s word? David began with truth statements, meditated on the implications of those truth statements, and then made application. At times, we can jump those steps. For example, we do not take time to meditate on truth before we apply. At other times, we may enjoy meditation but never consider how it should change us.

Lesson: Are you a searcher or a scanner? Let me explain. When a certain son of mine looks for something, he will walk into the room, scan it quickly as he turns around, and then tell my wife that he cannot find the item. I won’t say which parent he is like, but my wife can find anything in the house. She can go into the same room, search it thoroughly, and find the item if it is in the room. When David says God has searched him, how intensive is that search? Is God a searcher or a scanner?

Question: Read Judges 18:2, which uses the same Hebrew word as “searched” in 139:1 but translates it as “explore” or “search.” How does the example of the Danites paint a picture of what it means that God “searched” David? Explore has the idea of going back and forth to see all the details; the Danites were not just walking past a place and seeing only one perspective. When God searches, He explores our lives and sees them from all the different angles.

David devotes the first section of this psalm to declaring a single truth: God knows everything, which means He personally and thoroughly knows you. God “spies out” your life and knows you (cf. Judges 18:2). This knowledge is extremely personal. “Thou knowest” in verse 2 is emphatic, which means you could translate it “You yourself know. God’s knowledge of me is extremely personal. There is no go-between, snitch, tattletale, or informant. God knows you personally and thoroughly. How can this be?

First, God knows all that I do (139:2a). Any action that I take during my day, He knows. Psalm 139 does not mention the fear of the LORD, but this verse ought to form a foundation for fearing God. The fear of the LORD is the consciousness that God is there, knows, and cares. For those walking rightly with God, this truth—God knows all that I do—gives great confidence and results in a reverence for God. For those walking in the flesh, this truth is troubling. God knows all that I do.

Second, God knows all that I worry about (139:2b). “Thoughts” means anxious thoughts or the worries that consume our minds. “Afar off” could either mean God knows even when He is far away or mean that God knows our anxious thoughts before the thoughts even come to us. Considering what verses 7–12 say about God’s presence, the latter is the correct meaning. Even before anxious thoughts consume our minds, God knows those anxious thoughts. A good friend will know when something is worrying you, but only God can know those worries before you have them.

Question: If God already knows my anxious thoughts according to Psalm 139, why do other passages tell me to cast my cares or anxieties on God (e.g., 1 Peter 5:7)? One, we pray because God commands it (1 Thess. 5:17). Two, the act of giving our cares to God does a work in our hearts as we humble ourselves (“I can’t do this”) and acknowledge God’s control (“but God can do this”).

Third, God knows all that will happen to me (139:3–4). “Compasseth” means to carefully observe, which is why modern translations use words like “observe,” “search,” “comprehend,” or “scrutinize.” God is completely familiar “with all my ways.” God even knows what I will say before I say it (139:4). It is not that God has a hunch or general idea about what I will say. God knows “all of it.”

Have you ever walked through one of those full-body 360-degree scanners at the airport? That is how David describes God in verse 5. Notice the directions: before (in front), after (behind), and upon (above). There is no other way to say it: God knows all of me. David’s conclusion: God’s knowledge is too wonderful. It is too amazing to really understand.

Discussion

- 1) David responded to God's knowledge with amazement. What are some other ways that we might feel about God's knowledge? It could trouble us because we realize God knows our sin; it could bring great comfort because God knows what I am feeling; it could bring confidence because God knows what I need.
- 2) In Romans 11:33–36, Paul describes the unsearchableness of God's ways while quoting Isaiah 40:13 (v. 34) and Job 41:11 (v. 35). What are some of the common threads in these passages that connect to David's response in Psalm 139:6? All four passages (Romans, Isaiah, Job, and Psalms) exalt God into a one-of-a-kind category. In Isaiah, God is greater than idols and any earthly authority. In Job, God is proving to Job that Job cannot fully understand Him. In Romans, Paul is overwhelmed with God's wisdom and love for Israel after talking about it for three chapters! A correct and bigger view of God will always bring humble praise!
- 3) Some claim that God does not know the future or that He knows all the potential choices but not what will be chosen ("Openness of God theology"). How does this first section of Psalm 139 contradict that view? Verse 2 talks about God knowing my thoughts before I think them; verse 4 talks about God knowing my words. This seems to imply that God knows what is going to happen, not just what could happen.
- 4) Choose one of the lesson points. In what way(s) could that truth change what you feel, think, say, or do today?

4/7 | Psalm 139:7–18

Dr. Andrew Goodwill



God Cares / *You can trust the God Who personally cares and provides for you.*

Observation: Look back at the Psalm 139 structure (QR Code). Notice how David moves from declaring God’s knowledge (God knows) to meditating on the implication of God’s knowledge (God cares). In other words, David spends twelve verses answering the question “so what”? Why should it matter to me that God knows?

Lesson: Knowledge by itself brings no comfort. Imagine going through one of the toughest times of your life so far. This could be a relationship that has ended, the suicide of a high school friend, pain from physical illness, loss of a parent, anxiety over the loss of a hoped-for future, or even deep questions and doubts about God. In your deep time of trouble, you share everything with two friends you think are your friends. The first friend smiles sympathetically before saying “that’s tough for you” and walking out of the room. Their knowledge of your situation made no difference in your life because they did not truly care. In contrast, the other friend sits quietly with you before saying, “I am here. What do you need?” Similarly, God’s knowledge of us makes a difference to us because He cares for us.

Because God knows everything, you must humbly trust Him. Not only does God personally and thoroughly know you (139:1–6), but God also personally cares and provides for you (139:7–18). How do we see God’s personal care and provision for us?

One, God is always present with me (139:7–8). David took comfort in this reality. “Flee” may make it seem as if David was trying to run away, but the entire tone of the psalm desires God’s presence. Even if David wanted to escape as Jonah wanted, God would be there as He was with Jonah. Whether we fly into space (“heaven”) or tunnel far into the earth (“hell” or “sheol”), God is always with us.

Question: While God is always present, we may not always feel that He is present. In what situations or locations can it feel as if God is not there? Lonely times when we are away from friends and family, when we are the only one in a group that wants to do right, when severe and destructive weather comes, at points of personal discouragement over repeated sin...

Two, God leads me at all times (139:9–12). Location and time of day mean nothing to God. David used the same word, “lead,” as he did in Psalm 23:2 (“leads beside the still waters”). Unlike you and me who might miss something when it is dark out, there are no question marks or uncertainties with God when He leads.

Question: Read 1 Kings 20:23, which illustrates the common Ancient Near Eastern view of their gods. How do the words of the Aramean servants contrast with David’s view of God? The Aramean (Syrian) servants thought that different gods had power only over specific geographical regions. David understood that God ruled over all things.

Three, God created every part of me (13–16). “God formed (“possessed,” v. 13) and weaved (“covered,” v. 13) you together. David gets specific too. God created his inward parts (KJV: “reins”) which is the Hebrew word for kidneys. In other words, God skillfully (KJV: “curiously,” v. 15) oversaw the David’s development from embryo to birth, which lead David to praise and give thanks. That developmental work is what David declares to be marvelous or wonderful (v. 14). Verse 16 can be tricky to understand. It essentially says, “Your eyes saw my formlessness [because I was not born yet] and in Your book all my days were written [or determined] before they even existed.” God not only created every part of me but also knows how many days I will live.

Question: In what ways do verses 13–16 have immense bearing on the abortion issue? One, they place God’s care for man at the point of conception (v. 16), whereas pro-death supporters are “confused” about when life starts. Two, they give God control over how He allows someone to be formed, whereas pro-death supporters give

the mother control over whether a child with disabilities ought to live. Three, they declare all human life created by God as something wonderful (v. 14).

Four, God thinks about me continually (139:17–18). David was overwhelmed after all this meditation on the thoughtful care of God. He called God's thoughts "precious," something to be valued like a precious stone (cf. "costly" in 1 Kings 7:9–11). In fact, he could not even imagine how much effort and time God spent thinking about him. What does David mean by "when I awake, I am still with you"? Have you ever had something so amazing happen to you that you said, "I must be dreaming"? As David meditated on God's care, he felt as though he was dreaming. It was not a dream. God was still with him.

Discussion

- 1) Verses 13–16 have implications beyond the pro-life position.
 - a) If a friend were struggling with their self-image, how could the truths from these verses help them? Example: God designed all of them (physical features, aptitudes, personalities); God knew what they might be born with but also knew their life plan.
 - b) When we consider these truths, what should they lead us to do? One, be content with how God has made us. Two, be obedient to what God has planned for our lives. Three, believe that God never makes a mistake.
- 2) Choose one of the lesson points. In what way(s) could that truth change what you feel, think, say, or do today?

4/14 | Psalm 139:19–24

Dr. Andrew Goodwill



God Hears / *Humbly ask the all-knowing and caring God to help you pursue Him.*

Observation: Let's look again at the structure of Psalm 139 (QR Code). David moved from declaration (God knows) and meditation (God cares) to petition (God hears).

Lesson: We all know that person who takes a long time to finally get to their point. They spend five minutes describing a series of events that seem only slightly related. You spend the whole time trying to figure out the reason they are sharing this all with you. Finally, they get to the point and say, "So can I borrow your textbook?" While they may have arrived at their point eventually, you cannot figure out how their whole story connected to the point. Fortunately, David does a better job at connecting the dots even though it took eighteen verses to get there.

What difference does it make that God knows so much about me (139:1–6) and cares so much for me (139:7–18)? I must pursue God (139:19–24). David realized that God knows everything, which includes whether someone is wicked or righteous. David wanted nothing more than to make sure that he was on God's side. That is the point of the repeated request for God to search him in verses 1 and 23. Let's consider the three general requests within David's petition. How do we pursue God?

One, ask God to deal with the wicked (139:19–20). The wicked murder ("men of blood"), speak maliciously (KJV: "wickedly"), and spread lies (literally, "lift emptiness"). Notice how David called the wicked "your enemies." David asked God to deal with God's own enemies. David commanded the wicked to leave him because he did not want to be caught up in collateral damage! We show our trust by asking God to deal with His enemies.

Question: It is God's responsibility to deal with His enemies, not ours. Look at 2 Peter 3:3–10 together. What realities about God's

judgment does Peter give? One, the wicked mock the idea that God will judge them (v. 4). Two, God's timetable is not the same as our timetable (v. 8). Three, if God chooses to delay judgment, He does so wanting to give men more time to repent (v. 9). Four, God will judge the wicked (v. 10).

Two, commit to being on God's side (139:21–22). After David asked God to deal with the wicked, he reminded God that he was not among the wicked! He basically says, "God, you know me and know that I am on your side." "Hate" (vv. 21, 22) in the Old Testament can be emotional anger but more often means to reject. David declared his rejection of those who rebelled against God, not his emotional anger against them.

Question: James 4:4 warns the New Testament believer against friendship with the world.

- *What are some subtle ways that believers can be friends with the world?* We can grow desensitized to objectionable entertainment and watch without discernment. We can adopt the world's pursuit of materialism and definition of success. We can be more interested in what our unsaved coworkers think of us than what God thinks of us at work.
- *What might it look like in each given way to reject the world like David said he was rejecting the wicked?* Entertainment: I can separate by having clear principles with wise application for what I will watch. Pursuits: I can enjoy the good gifts of God but give God the best of my time, devotion, and wealth. Opinion: I can shine the gospel light in my workplace by seeking to please God alone.

Three, ask God to help you follow Him (139:23–24). David knew that he was not perfect and was prone to sin, just like the wicked. If you doubt that, look back at our Psalm 51 lessons! He closes this masterful psalm with six intertwined requests. O God, hear my petition and do these things because you know me completely and care for me personally.

- Search me—explore every single area of my life from every perspective possible.

- Know my heart—because my heart is deceitful and unknowable (cf. Jer. 17:9).
- Try/test me—help me be found genuine through your inspection.
- Know my thoughts—understanding my anxious thoughts (cf. Psa. 94:19).
- See if I am wicked—because I also want to know if I have an idolatrous heart.
- Lead me in the way—help me walk a righteous life (Psa. 23:2).

Because God knows everything, you must humbly trust Him.

Discussion

- 1) Jeremiah 17:9 warns us about the deceitfulness of our hearts. How can a believer avoid being deceived by their hearts? One, pray just like David did. Two, study God's word (think Psalm 1). Three, seek godly counsel from those who should be counseling you (parents, pastors).
- 2) Why do you think it is important that David asked God for help rather than just promising he would try harder? Try to connect your ideas to Scripture. David recognized his sinful heart (Jer. 17:9). It is God Who changes us into the image of Christ, not our self-effort (2 Cor. 3:18).
- 3) Choose one of the lesson points. In what way(s) could that truth change what you feel, think, say, or do today?

4/21 | Psalm 126

Dr. Andrew Goodwill

*You must embrace God's chastening
as a joyous thing in your life.*



Observation: Read Psalm 126 together. Did you notice the repeated words: Turn/restore and captivity/fortune (126:1, 4)? This repetition divides the two sections of the Psalm. Verses 1–3 are in the past tense. The psalmist is praising God as he reflects on God's restoration after a period of captivity. Verse 4 are prayers for future restoration from captivity? These restorations are two different ones: one past and one still future (from the perspective of the psalmist). How does this fit together?

Let's look at the timeline link through the QR code. Although we cannot be dogmatic, it seems like this psalm was written after the first return from the Babylonian captivity (538 B.C.). Verses 1–3 look back at this restoration. Verse 4 prays for a future return of captives still in Babylon, a prayer God answered in 458 B.C. with Ezra and in 445 B.C. with Nehemiah.

What does this all do to our understanding of the psalm? The entire psalm discusses the joy of restoration to God after a time of chastening by God.

Lesson

Question: What is one of the exciting moments in your life that you would describe as surreal or almost like a dream because it was so incredible? Leaders, probe for a few answers and explanations.

Giving my vows to my wife at our wedding, holding my firstborn at the hospital, and graduating with my final degree are a few of my dreamlike moments. The emotions overwhelmed me, and the thoughts raced, which all led to an amazing and nearly indescribable joy. If you can imagine or remember a similar feeling, you will understand the feeling behind Psalm 126. When God worked powerfully to restore disobedient Israel from Babylonian captivity, the restored ones felt like it was a dream. After God chastens His people, He restores them. Consider three things the psalm says about God's restoration.

First, God gives joy to the restored (126:1–3). The psalm conveys the joy as a progression from speechless (“like dream,” 126:1), to laughing because they did not know what to say (126:2), and then to shouting out with joy (KJV: “singing”). God gave them gladness in their restoration.

Question: Read Psalm 51:8 and 12. How do these verses connect to this truth from Psalm 126? Sin robs us of joy, which means repentance and restoration bring joy; a right relationship with God should have joy; chastening brings hardship (“bones you have crushed, 51:8).

Second, God glorifies Himself when He restores (126:2). Notice how the other nations viewed the restoration. When they saw what God did, they said to each other, “the LORD has done great things for them.” Those restored echo the nations’ words in verse 3. When God restores, He ought to receive all the glory from both witnesses and the restored ones.

Question: In what ways can we struggle to glorify God when He brings back another believer? We do not think they have suffered enough for what they have done; we think that some sins are too much for people to be restored; we might continue to hold their sin against them.

Third, God restores on His timeline (126:4). The “streams of the South” or Negev (Hebrew for “south”) were dry riverbeds called wadis. They can go from bone dry to raging rivers in a few minutes if torrential rain happens upstream. When the psalmist prays for God to restore “as the streams,” he prays for a flash-flood restoration. Yes, God can delay restoration for 70 years as He did during the Babylonian captivity, but He can also work quickly. He chastens as needed but can work on any timetable.

Right after the prayer for future restoration in verse 4, the psalmist gives a two-verse illustration. Remember, context is king when it comes to interpretation. God’s chastening and restoration have been the topic of the entire psalm to this point. Our interpretation of verses 5–6 must connect to verses 1–4. What is the connection? Just like a farmer must endure hardship before experiencing the joy of the harvest, God’s

people must endure the hardship of God's chastening before they experience the joy of his restoration.

Two details help support this interpretation. One, "precious seed" in the KJV sounds like something spiritual but just means "seed for planting." The focus of this first line is on the hardship endured by the farmer rather than some spiritual service like sowing the seeds of the gospel. We need to be careful not to read passages like Luke 8:11 ("the seed is the Word of God") back into the Old Testament. Two, "joy" in verses 5–6 is the same Hebrew word as "joy" in verse 2, which was the result of God's restoration.

When you find yourself under the chastening of God, endure the hardship as God works in your life because the joy that comes from His restoration afterward is a sure thing.

Discussion

- 1) Proverbs 3:11–12 warns against belittling ("despising") the chastening of God rather than learning from it. How can we sometimes belittle what God is trying to do in our lives and end up missing a joyful restoration? We blame everything and everyone else for hardships in our lives rather than stopping to consider if it is God; we refuse the lighter chastening of God by rejecting wise counsel or rebuke from friends; we try to move too quickly away from chastening and demanding that God restore quickly.
- 2) In what ways does Psalm 126 give us hope in the middle of God's chastening? (1) it gives examples of God's past restoration; (2) it gives assurance in the last few verses that joy comes afterward; (3) it focuses our thoughts on God; (4) it patterns our response, that is, prayer in verse 4.
- 3) What is one practical thing you can do this week because of the truths Psalm 126 contains? Praise God for past instances of forgiveness and restoration; encourage a friend who is struggling and wandering from God to return to God; pay attention every time you read or hear God's Word because He might be trying to get your attention.

4/28 | Psalm 145

Dr. David Anderson



Leader: wait to read the Psalm until indicated in the study.

There are hymn resources on the Small Group Resource page under this lesson if you want your small group to have hymn texts while you sing.

Our walk through the Psalms this year has been delightful. I trust you have reveled in the greatness of your God, His amazing love for His children, His passion for their holiness and faithfulness, His majesty over creation, mankind, and time.

As the Bible's Songbook was being compiled, it is not surprising to see this psalm of praise, the last one directly attributed to King David, organized together with the final five psalms of abundant praise to our God. When one comes to know God intimately, he is drawn to sing praise to his God for Who He is and what He does. Just as these final six songs bring the Psalter to conclude on a high note of praise to the Lord, so our lives should be filled with high notes of praise in song and testimony to our great God. Do you consistently have a song of praise to God in your heart and on your lips? If not, passionately pursue knowing God better through His Word. You'll catch yourself singing His praises.

David was a top-tier poet and composer (someday when I grow up, I want to be like him). I wish we all knew Hebrew well so we could fully enjoy the beauty of this song.³ Not only does this psalm follow a normal praise psalm pattern of a call to praise (vv. 1, 2), the causes of praise (vv. 3-20), and a concluding universal invitation to praise (v. 21), but it is also one of only nine acrostic psalms, the first word of each verse beginning with the next Hebrew letter in the alphabet.⁴ This was probably a memorization aid, but it could as well indicate that the Lord is worthy of every and all our words of praise, the best and fullest we finite believers can offer our Creator and Redeemer. In addition to be acrostic, what is so unique about this psalm's poetry is the structure that David employs.

³ For a deeper dive into the study of this Psalm, I would recommend the New American Commentary series. The material for this Bible Study is based on that material.

⁴ The other acrostic Psalms are: 9 and 10 together, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119.

There appear to be four distinct sections to the “causes of praise” division of the song. David here is rejoicing in the big principles, the expansive theology, of God’s greatness and goodness, rather than focusing on specific examples of God’s greatness and goodness (like the Exodus, the defeat of his enemies, etc.). So, David moves back and forth between praising God’s greatness (vv. 3-6 and vv. 10-13) and His goodness (vv. 7-9 and vv. 14-20). Let’s dive in!

Read 145:1–2. Notice in this call to praise that David desires to praise God, his King, both forever and every day. Our King deserves that much praise. Have you been singing His praises today?

Read 145:3–6 about God’s greatness.

- v. 3 | Because God’s greatness is infinite, we will never be able to know its full breadth, length, depth, and height. In every way, God exceeds.
- v. 4 | Because God is great, we are compelled to tell the generation after us of His work and power. What a significant ministry!
- v. 5 | We must tell the next generation of God’s glorious splendor and wonderful Words as well.⁵
- v. 6 | Adding to the list, we should speak of God’s awesomeness! Like David, may I personally determine to do my part in communicating God’s greatness to the next generation.

SO... let’s pick and sing a song together that will help us declare God’s greatness. (If you’re next door to another small group, sing louder than them.) 😊 Leaders: singing is a good thing. Try to make it work in your group!

Read 145:7–9 about God’s goodness.

What a list of God’s goodnesses! No wonder we “bubble up” (abundantly utter) in song as we remember that God always does what

⁵ The usual translation of this Hebrew word is “words” though it can also be “works.” Since God’s work was already mentioned in v. 4, and it appears David is expanding on the list of things to tell the next generation rather than repeating topics in v. 4, it seems reasonable to translate the Hebrew word here as “words.”

is right, gracious, compassionate, longsuffering, and merciful to everyone.

SO... what is a song that we know that declares at least one of God's goodnesses to us?

Read 145:10–13 about God's greatness.

Yes, all of God's creation declares the glory of the Lord, but those of us who know Him personally (saints) have been given the privilege and responsibility to "make known to the sons of men" that God's great kingdom extends its authority over all mankind from every generation, and everyone is called to submit to Him as Lord and Savior. It is appropriate for believers to sing and testify to the world of our great salvation and of God's offer of salvation to all.

SO... what is a song that we know that declares to the world that God is our Redeemer and Lord and His offer of salvation extends to all of them? When and where would be appropriate place(s) and time(s) to sing that song?

Read 145:14–20 about God's goodness.

In verses 7–9, God's goodness is seen in His character. In this section we see God's goodness in His principled interactions with mankind. David starts with truths that apply broadly to all—God supports the fallen and burdened. He provides sustenance and meets the needs of all of us (vv. 14-16). Verse 17 is the centerpiece and turning point of this section. Never forget that in all His ways and works, God always does what is right and holy. So, He is especially near His obedient children, hearing their prayers, caring for their needs and burdens, watching over them all the way home (vv. 18, 19). Though He is good to all, those who reject Him and His truth will be destroyed because He is righteous and holy (v. 20).

SO... let's pick and sing a song together that will help us declare God's goodness to us as believers.

Read 145:21. Here's the invitation. Will you join the choir of all those who lift their voices to praise the Lord and bless His holy name forever? I hope you catch yourself singing God's praises today and for the rest of your life.