

The Psalms

THE INFINITE VALUE OF THE PSALMS

I LOVE the Psalms, but...I didn't always love them.

To be honest: when I was a younger Christian, I thought the Psalms were a waste of space. –Harsh thinking, I know! How could a person claim to love Scripture (which I did), but not like the largest book in the Bible? Theologically, this amounts to believing that God didn't know what He was doing when the Holy Spirit inspired the Psalms. Other Christians would often speak of the Psalms with a special reverence, and for the longest time, I just didn't get what all the hype was about.

My regret runs even deeper—even after I had read through the entire book of Psalms a few times, I still wasn't convinced of their value. Two or three times a year, I'd get a strong impression that I needed to read/study/pray some of the Psalms. Occasionally, I'd ignore this desire, and I ended up with some pretty fruitless quiet times...so it was with reluctance that I would return to the Psalms, and God would bless my time with him—but my heart was still too hard to love the Psalms like other believers did.

Over time, this changed. There wasn't a single moment where God changed my entire attitude overnight. I wish there was, it would make for a better story! Instead, for me, it was a gradual process where I began to develop a deep love and appreciation for the Psalms.

The Psalms stand as one of the most unique books among the collection of already unique books that make up the Bible. It's the biggest book, by far. It's quoted more than any other book of the Bible. Although I couldn't prove it, I bet it's the most read.

I think the most interesting thing about this book is its dual nature. The Psalms are Holy Scripture, and this means it's God's Word to people. Secondly, as songs and prayer, they are also our words to God. When you or I read from the Psalms, we are simultaneously listening to God and speaking to him. The very idea of hearing and speaking at the same time calls for reflection.

When you struggle with your prayer life, the Psalms are a great place to turn. Praying the Psalms back to God can be an amazing experience. I often meet people who say, "I don't know how to pray or what to say." The solution is the Psalms. There are many things in the Psalms that are confusing, but human experience is universal. We all feel moments of triumph and moments of pain. We are thankful, joyful and ready to glorify God. And we also feel lonely, unappreciated, and overwhelmed. The Psalms express all these things and more.

The book of Psalms is a book about knowing God... talking to him honestly and authentically, listening to him, searching to find out what he's really like. It's a book that documents the journeys of different God-seekers by letting us in on their conversations with the Creator. Through their prayers and songs, we can follow the well-worn paths they traveled as they discovered greater intimacy with the Father.

I'm proud of you for taking the Rootworks challenge!

Blessings,

Matt McGill

A free gift for you.

This Rootworks Bible study is my gift to you. This may not seem like an expensive gift, but the treasures you will learn from studying God’s Word will be priceless. I’m thrilled that you want to study the Bible! One of my greatest joys is to see people reading and learning from God’s love-letter. Thank you for bringing me joy!

What is Rootworks?

The name Rootworks comes from one of my favorite passages:

*“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”
(Colossians 2:6-7)*

As you can see from reading the passage, spiritual growth requires nourishment—and it can only be found in Jesus. The imagery in this passage suggests that our spiritual roots must grow deep so that we’ll continue in our vital relationship with God. This Rootworks study isn’t just about learning more about the Bible, it’s also about growing closer to Jesus.

How can I use this resource?

- 1. Start with Prayer.** This isn’t just a formality, it’s a necessity. Ask God to cleanse your heart, confess your sins and remove your guilt. Ask God to prepare your heart to hear his voice, then take some quiet time to listen. Finally, ask God to keep your heart focused and distraction free. These things are impossible without the power of the Holy Spirit, so spend some time alone with God in prayer.
- 2. Read the Bible Passage.** Read it all the way through two to three times. Make some general observations and think about the overall meaning of the passage.
- 3. Consider the Reflection Questions.** These questions are intended to be a springboard to get you started thinking about the passage. Answer them at your own pace, move slow because the goal is to spend meaningful time with God, not to necessarily finish the lesson. If a question doesn’t make sense or you can’t answer it, have feel the freedom to skip it. If your thoughts go down a path differently than the questions, awesome! The point is to grow closer to Jesus, not finish a “homework assignment.”

How long will Rootworks take to finish?

This depends on how much thought you give to answering the questions. They are not intended to be “raced through.” Your goal shouldn’t be speed. It should be comprehension and personal application. As a general rule, each lesson should take 30-45 minutes.

How often should I complete a lesson?

This depends upon you -- how often you decide to sit down and study this material. The idea would be to stay on a consistent pace. You don't want to do too much too quickly and get burned out or frustrated. At the same time, you don't want to answer one question a month because this will break up the continuity and cohesiveness of the lesson,

What do I do When I finish all eight lessons?

Celebrate! You will have worked hard to reach this goal. Chances are you'll have some questions; and if you are in a small group, discuss those together with your Group Leader. If you're not in a small group, let me know that you've finished this study so I can celebrate with you! (matt.mcgill@newlifepismo.com)

What Bible translation should I use?

You can use just about any Bible translation to research your answers to the questions. When I prepared this study, I used NIV (New International Version), but I've worded the questions so you can use almost any Bible and follow along easily. If you want to compare translations, you can log onto www.biblegateway.com, enter the passage and choose a translation with which you're most comfortable.

If this translation talk is confusing, don't worry about it. Basically, when the Bible was written 2,000 plus years ago, it was written in different languages. The New Testament was written in Greek and the Old Testament was primarily written in Hebrew. The Bible you own has been translated from its original language into English so you can read and understand it. (If you think economics is tough, you should try Hebrew!) Have you ever noticed that you use some words differently than the ways your parents use those same words? After a time, words simply change their meaning; therefore, we have different translations of the Greek and Hebrew. Imagine the changes that would occur over 400 years! That was when the King James Version was written . . . and that is why some of the language sounds so difficult to understand. As a general rule, try to read a fairly recent translation.

Should I also write in my own Bible during this study?

Yes! I hope you will write notes in the margin of your Bible, underline or highlight key verses, and watch your Bible come alive as a letter from God, waiting to tell you more about Him and His desires for your life.

Why do a personal Bible study instead of just attending another church program?

Church programs aren't bad! I've put this notebook together because I want you to learn how to study the Bible on your own. It would be easy for you to find another weekly Bible study or class to attend. Perhaps you are already involved in one of these. Chances are, you show up and listen to someone else teach. While being part of this type of small group can be very important, it's definitely not the only thing necessary for long-term spiritual maturity.

We need to talk to others about the Bible and we need to think about it on our own.

I want you to develop the *habit* of studying God's Word. This life-changing habit is more important than just attending church programs or reading Christian books.

HOW TO READ THE BOOK OF PSALMS

As I mentioned in the opening letter, one of the unique characteristics of the Psalms is its dual nature: the Psalms are God's Word to us and at the same time, they are our words back to God.

When we don't know WHAT to pray, we can pray the Psalms.

When we don't know HOW to pray, we can learn from the Psalms.

The book of Psalms is a book of poetry. As such, they do not make for quick and easy reading. Think about reading poetry in your English class at school. You may take a whole class period just to analyze just a few lines of one poem because the language is "condensed." That is to say, a lot of meaning is packed into just a few words. Keep this in mind as you're reading through the book of Psalms.

In English, different types of poems have different *forms*. If you were asked to describe what constitutes a poem, you'd probably say, "poems typically rhyme." Here's a classic children's poem:

Hickory, dickory, dock.
The mouse ran up the clock.
The clock struck one,
The mouse ran down,
Hickory, dickory, dock.

Hebrew poetry has form, too. Instead of being about rhyming, however, its all about the *pairing of ideas*-- putting two thoughts next to each to convey an overall meaning. Essentially, there are three basic kinds of Hebrew parallelism:

1. Sometimes the second thought repeats or restates the first thought.

Think of an apple and another apple. (The technical term is "synonymous parallelism")

Biblical example: *Save me, Lord, from lying lips
and from deceitful tongues. (Psalm 120:2)*

2. Sometimes the second thought is the exact opposite of the first thought.

Think of an apple and an orange. (The technical term is "antithetical parallelism")

Biblical example: *You save the humble
but bring low those whose eyes are haughty. (Psalm 18:27)*

3. Sometimes the second thought restates the first thought, but carries it further.

Think of an apple and a huge barrel of apples. (The technical term is "synthetic parallelism")

Biblical example: *Why, Lord, do you stand far off?
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? (Psalm 10:1)*

Why do I tell you all of this? No, there won't be a test, but I want you to know what to look for so that you can better understand what you are reading.

UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT KINDS OF PSALMS

Scholars have divided the Psalms into a few different “groupings” that can be helpful in understanding each Psalm’s purpose and meaning. There are eight different types explained below. It should be noted that some people split the Psalms up into more groups than this, and some others use less. These groupings aren’t perfect. The criteria for what makes a Psalm one type as opposed to another is not universally agreed upon, so these are just some general guidelines.

Torah Psalms

“Torah” literally means instruction (and also refers to the five books of Moses, which are the first five books of the Bible, (Genesis through Deuteronomy). Torah Psalms focus on the importance of God’s instruction and what role it should play in the life of a believer. Only 3 out of the 150 Psalms are considered “Torah” Psalms. However, the longest Psalm in the Bible (119) is a Torah Psalm. (The other two Torah Psalms are 1 and 19.)

Wisdom Psalms

Reading a wisdom Psalm is like reading the Book of Proverbs. There is a lot of “practical” advice, contrasting the righteous with the wicked, as well as, the rich and poor. There is emphasis on trusting in the Lord, gaining understanding, and the foolishness of only attaining possessions. (Psalms 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128, 133 are good examples of wisdom Psalms.)

Praise Psalms

Praise Psalms aren’t really “studied” so much as they are absorbed. Reading a praise Psalm is like being in the ocean when a huge wave washes over you. Overwhelmed in the midst of the experience, you’re inspired to contemplate how it spiritually affects you. Praise Psalms seem to be relatively easy to understand, but one shouldn’t discard the profound in the simple. Structurally, these Psalms present a call to praise God. The Psalmist often offers several reasons why God deserves our praise: his absolute power and might, his work as creator, his control over human history, his mercy. The point is clear: it’s not enough to allow the simplicity of “praise God” wash over our lives without purifying our hearts. (Psalms 8, 29, 33, 47, 65, 78, 93, 95–100, 103–6, 111, 113, 114, 117, 134, 135, 136, 145–50 are good examples of praise Psalms.)

Lament Psalms

Lament Psalms were composed from the depths of human despair and express darker sides of human experience. Worshiping God is stretched to the limit as the Psalmist deals with confusion, doubt, disappointment and even anger. These feelings exist for the mature Christians. In fact, it seems impossible to be spiritually mature without walking through these dark valleys. Many people enter God’s family during difficult times. The Lament Psalms describe what happens when the spiritual person struggles through crisis. Though stretched and strained, the Psalmist still hopes in the Lord. (Psalms 5, 22, 44, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 94, 123, 137 are good examples of lament Psalms.)

Zion Psalms

Zion is an “ancient name for various parts of Jerusalem, of Judah and all the holy land, as well as, a metaphor for the people of God...” (Anchor Bible Dictionary). Zion Psalms focus on God’s presence among the Israelites—specifically in Jerusalem, although Zion can also be metaphorical. Since God can be found and known, these Psalms can express a deep desire to travel to the physical location of the Temple, which was in Jerusalem. For those who enjoy God’s presence, they have protection and security from harm. (Psalms 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122 are good examples of Zion Psalms.)

Thanksgiving Psalms

While Praise Psalms focus on the glory of who God is, Thanksgiving Psalms tend to be an expression of gratitude for what God has done. Often times, these Psalms will follow a common form: the author is in distress, then he calls to God for help, and God comes to his rescue. In a way, Thanksgiving Psalms are similar to a personal testimony. They tell a story about God’s help and thanking him for what he has done. (Psalms 18, 30, 32, 92, 116, 118, 138 are good examples of thanksgiving Psalms.)

Royal Psalms

Rather than having a common form, Royal Psalms have a common theme: the king. It’s important to remember that the Psalms were actually songs that were sung and played in a corporate (group) setting. Today in the church, we have certain songs for specific types of events. One song might be appropriate to sing on a national holiday, while another might be better served for a wedding. It was the same way in Ancient Israel, and these Royal Psalms were all used at events where the king was involved (his coronation, his victory in battle, the establishment of his kingdom.) While these Psalms were first used in association with the earthly kings of Israel, many Christians believe they are also prophetically talking about the coming Messiah—the King of Kings. (Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132 are royal Psalms.)

Liturgical Psalms

Just like Royal Psalms, the Liturgical Psalms were reserved for a certain purpose. These Psalms were used during the order of public worship (or liturgy) in the temple. Just like we have certain songs to accompany different “sacraments” that we take part in (communion, baptism, etc.), these Psalms may have been for certain “rites” as well. (Psalms 15, 24, 50, 81, 95, 115, 132 are good examples of liturgical Psalms.)

Overview

Now that you have a basic understanding of the different types of Psalms, here is an overview of the Psalms we will cover in this workbook and the category into which they can most easily be placed:

Lesson 1:	Psalm 1	Torah
Lesson 2:	Psalm 119	Torah
Lesson 3:	Psalm 73	Wisdom
Lesson 4:	Psalm 95	Praise
Lesson 5:	Psalm 22	Lament
Lesson 6:	Psalm 84	Zion
Lesson 7:	Psalm 32	Thanksgiving
Lesson 8:	Psalm 116	Thanksgiving

LESSON 1

1. Get started with prayer. Ask God (a) to clean your heart, confess your sins and guilt, (b) to prepare your heart to hear his voice, and (c) to keep your heart focused and distraction free.
2. Read the Bible passage. Read it all the way through two to three times. Use the space below to make some general observations and think through the overall meaning.

Psalm 1

- 1 Blessed is the one
 who does not walk in step with the wicked
 or stand in the way that sinners take
 or sit in the company of mockers,
- 2 but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
 and who meditates on his law day and night.
- 3 That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
 which yields its fruit in season
 and whose leaf does not wither—
 whatever they do prospers.
- 4 Not so the wicked!
 They are like chaff
 that the wind blows away.
- 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
 nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
- 6 For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
 but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

Reflection Questions

Re-read the Psalm and make a list of anything that is confusing or doesn't make sense.

Underline or circle the keywords in this Psalm and list them below:

In your opinion, what is the significance of walking, standing, and sitting? How are the "blessed" supposed to relate to the "wicked?"

Based on this passage, what are the attributes/characteristics/actions of the "blessed" person?

Based on this passage, what are the attributes/characteristics/actions of the "wicked?"

In your opinion, what is the "law" of the Lord? Why is it called "law?"

The following three questions will help you consider what this Psalm teaches about our capacity to delight:

(a) In your opinion what does it mean to “delight” in the law of the Lord?

(b) Do we have a choice over what we delight in? In other words, can we decide what we like and what we don't like? Explain why you feel the way you do.

(c) The “but” in verse two is significant, as it draws a contrast between walking/standing/sitting with the wicked AND delighting in God's law. In your opinion, why does the Psalmist make these two actions contrary to one another.

This Psalm says of the blessed man: “whatever he does prospers” If this is true, then why do bad things still happen to people who are “blessed?” What does “prosper” really mean? Look to the text to support your answers.

Re-read verses 1-3. Why is the picture of the tree and river used, what's the point of this powerful word picture? What clues from the text support your answer?

Chaff is the coverings and other debris separated from the seed in threshing grain—it is the worthless part of grain that is stripped away from the wheat and thrown away. How is the tree different from the chaff?

Reread verses 5 and 6. What does this Psalm teach about the future?

Based on your reflections from this Psalm, which of the following best describes your spiritual life, and more importantly, why?

- “Blessed” or “righteous”
- “With the wicked” (walking, standing, sitting with them)
- “Wicked”

Why?

As you conclude your study and reflection of this Psalm, what verse or phrase stands out as the most meaningful for you personally? Explain why.

LESSON 2

1. Get started with prayer. Ask God (a) to clean your heart, confess your sins and guilt, (b) to prepare your heart to hear his voice, and (c) to keep your heart focused and distraction free.
2. Read the Bible passage. Read it all the way through two to three times. Use the space below to make some general observations and think through the overall meaning.

Psalm 119 (selections)

Selection #1

- 1 Blessed are those whose ways are blameless who walk according to the law of the Lord.
- 2 Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart—
- 3 they do no wrong but follow his ways.
- 4 You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed.
- 5 Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees!
- 6 Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands.
- 7 I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws.
- 8 I will obey your decrees; do not utterly forsake me.

Selection #2

- 81 My soul faints with longing for your salvation, but I have put my hope in your word.
- 82 My eyes fail, looking for your promise; I say, “When will you comfort me?”
- 83 Though I am like a wineskin in the smoke¹, I do not forget your decrees.
- 84 How long must your servant wait? When will you punish my persecutors?
- 85 The arrogant dig pits to trap me, contrary to your law.
- 86 All your commands are trustworthy; help me, for I am being persecuted without cause.
- 87 They almost wiped me from the earth, but I have not forsaken your precepts.
- 88 In your unfailing love preserve my life, that I may obey the statutes of your mouth.

Selection #3

- 97 Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.
- 98 Your commands are always with me and make me wiser than my enemies.
- 99 I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes.
- 100 I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.
- 101 I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word.
- 102 I have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught me.
- 103 How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
- 104 I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path.

¹ **Wineskin in the smoke**—Wine bottles of skin were hung up in smoke to dry them before use. This imagery suggests that the Psalmist was withered by sorrow.

Reflection Questions

Re-read the Psalm and make a list of anything that is confusing or doesn't make sense.

Analyze these selections from Psalm 119 by identifying the following: (a) key words, (b) actions of the blessed (c) the actions or promises of God, and (d) summarize the overall tone of the section. Use the following chart so you can see the similarities and differences.

	Verses 1-8	Verses 81-88	Verses 97-104
Key words			
Actions of a blessed person			
Actions and promises of God			
Overall tone and feel			

Selection #1: Verses 1-8

Based on verses 1-8, what does it mean to seek God with all of your heart?

Verse 1 says “the blameless walk according to the law of the Lord.” How do you make most of your decisions—both the big ones and the little ones? Are they based on God’s word? Your feelings? Your goals? What other people think? Something else?

Re-read verse 6. God’s Word moved the Psalmist to feel shame, and he didn’t want to repeat this experience. How does this verse make you feel? Do you feel “shame” when you read the Bible?

Since God is loving and he forgives us, should a person ever feel “shame” when we read the Bible?

Since nobody is perfect, won’t everyone always feel a little bit of “shame” when we read the Bible? Is it possible to read the Bible without being ashamed?

Verse 7 has the antidote for a person who has a “praise problem,” a spiritual rut where it is difficult to say thanks to God. What is the cure? Have you ever personally experienced this in your life?

Re-read verse 8. What's the connection between obeying God's ways and being forsaken by Him? Is God's love conditional, meaning we need to obey him in order to be loved?

Selection #2: Verses 81-88

Re-read this selection. In your own words, describe the emotional state of the Psalmist.

Based on the text, how does the Psalmist relate to God's Word?

In your opinion, why is it important that God's commands are trustworthy?

Is it ok to be sad as a Christian? Don't we have access to the joy that is found in Christ? If so why would a believer ever be sad?

In your opinion, why are Christians so good at being fake and so bad at showing what's real? What can you do to help change this?

The Psalmist is on the edge of death, according to this text, why does he want God to save his life?

Selection #3: Verses 97-104

In your own words, write a definition for “meditation.”

As you evaluate your thought life, what are the things you think about the most?

What are some practical ways you can have easy access to God’s law, the Bible, in your life? How can you be like the Psalmist and have God’s commands with you “always.”

Having a position or being a certain age – that is, a teacher or an elder—doesn’t necessarily make a person wise. According to this Psalm, what makes a person wise with understanding?

As you conclude your study and reflection of this Psalm, what verse or phrase stands out as the most meaningful for you personally? Explain why?

LESSON 3

1. Get started with prayer. Ask God (a) to clean your heart, confess your sins and guilt, (b) to prepare your heart to hear his voice, and (c) to keep your heart focused and distraction free.
2. Read the Bible passage. Read it all the way through two to three times. Use the space below to make some general observations and think through the overall meaning.

Psalm 73

1 Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.
2 But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.
3 For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
4 They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong.
5 They are free from common human burdens; they are not plagued by human ills.
6 Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence.
7 From their callous hearts comes iniquity; their evil imaginations have no limits.
8 They scoff, and speak with malice; with arrogance they threaten oppression.
9 Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth.
10 Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance.
11 They say, "How would God know? Does the Most High know anything?"
12 This is what the wicked are like— always free of care, they go on amassing wealth.
13 Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence.
14 All day long I have been afflicted, and every morning brings new punishments.
15 If I had spoken out like that, I would have betrayed your children.
16 When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply
17 till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.
18 Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin.
19 How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors!
20 They are like a dream when one awakes; when you arise, Lord, you will despise them as fantasies.
21 When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered,
22 I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.
23 Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand.
24 You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.
25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.
26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
27 Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.
28 But as for me, it is good to be near God.
I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

Reflection Questions

Re-read the Psalm and make a list of anything that is confusing or doesn't make sense.

Re-read verse 1. What's the relationship between "Israel" and "those who are pure in heart?" Are they the same thing (that is, all of "Israel" is also "pure")? Are they different? Are the "pure" a sub-group of Israel, or is it possible to be "pure" without being of Israel?

Re-read verses 4-12 and write a description of the "arrogant."

In your own words, how would you describe the feelings of the Psalmist? What tension is he experiencing and expressing to God?

Do you identify with the tone of this Psalm? Describe a recent situation in your life that is similar?

In your opinion, what is the spiritual condition of the writer of this Psalm?

Verse 13 represents a mind-set that isn't true. That is to say, it's never a waste of time to live a pure life. Why is this included in the Bible if it's not a "right" way to feel? Even if we shouldn't feel this way, sometimes we will...what's the best thing to do when we find ourselves in this condition?

How has God used confusion and doubt to change your life?

Based on the text, what is the "antidote" or solution to the tension the Psalmist was facing? What could this solution look like in your life?

At the end of his very raw and personal struggle, the writer comes to the conclusion that, "It is good to be near God, I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge" (v. 28.). Practically speaking, what does it look like for you to be personally near God, making him your refuge?

As you conclude your study and reflection of this Psalm, what verse or phrase stands out as the most meaningful for you personally? Explain why.

LESSON 4

1. Get started with prayer. Ask God (a) to clean your heart, confess your sins and guilt, (b) to prepare your heart to hear his voice, and (c) to keep your heart focused and distraction free.
2. Read the Bible passage. Read it all the way through two to three times. Use the space below to make some general observations and think through the overall meaning.

Psalm 95

- 1 Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
- 2 Let us come before him with thanksgiving
and extol him with music and song.
- 3 For the Lord is the great God,
the great King above all gods.
- 4 In his hand are the depths of the earth,
and the mountain peaks belong to him.
- 5 The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.
- 6 Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;
- 7 for he is our God
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.
- Today, if only you would hear his voice,
- 8 “Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah,
as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness,
9 where your ancestors tested me;
they tried me, though they had seen what I did.
- 10 For forty years I was angry with that generation;
I said, ‘They are a people whose hearts go astray,
and they have not known my ways.’
- 11 So I declared on oath in my anger,
‘They shall never enter my rest.’”

Something Extra:

Check out Hebrews 3:9-4:11 to see what how New Testament interprets this Psalm.

Reflection Questions

Re-read the Psalm and make a list of anything that is confusing or doesn't make sense.

Based on your experience, why is singing an important way to worship God? How is it personally meaningful for you?

Verse 2 says, "Let us come before him with thanksgiving." Make a list of 20 things for which you can give thanks to God.

For you personally, how could you become more thankful and cultivate more gratitude towards God?

What gets in the way of being thankful? When we stop to think about it, everything we have comes from God, so how do we get distracted and forget to be thankful?

According to this Psalm, why should a person worship God? What reasons does the writer give?

Verses 1 and 2 use the word “us,” meaning that worshiping God is something done in community. Why do you think this is important? Why isn’t it enough to simply worship God on our own, alone from others? Can’t worship just be a personal action?

This is a Psalm of worship and thanksgiving. According to this Psalm, what are the physical actions and posture of worship? Why are each of these important?

The end of verse 7 through verse 11 give a strong warning against hardening one’s heart toward God. Their ancestors tested God, even though they had seen God in action. Describe a time when you lacked faith and tested God with a hard heart.

What are some practical clues from this Psalm that can help us not to have a hard heart?

Consider the condition of your heart today. Would you describe it as “hard” or “soft” toward spiritual things and hearing God speak? Why? How do you think your heart got hard, or, practically speaking, how do you keep your heart soft?

As you conclude your study and reflection of this Psalm, what verse or phrase stands out as the most meaningful for you personally? Explain why.

LESSON 5

1. Get started with prayer. Ask God (a) to clean your heart, confess your sins and guilt, (b) to prepare your heart to hear his voice, and (c) to keep your heart focused and distraction free.
2. Read the Bible passage. Read it all the way through two to three times. Use the space below to make some general observations and think through the overall meaning.

Psalm 22

1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?

2 My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.

3 Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises.

4 In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them.

5 To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

6 But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people.

7 All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.

8 “He trusts in the Lord,” they say, “let the Lord rescue him.
Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.”

9 Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you, even at my mother’s breast.

10 From birth I was cast on you; from my mother’s womb you have been my God.

11 Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

12 Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.

13 Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me.

14 I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me.

15 My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death.

16 Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet.

17 All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me.

18 They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.

19 But you, Lord, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me.

20 Deliver me from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs.

21 Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen.

22 I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you.

23 You who fear the Lord, praise him!
All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!
Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!

24 For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one;
he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.

25 From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly;
before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows.

26 The poor will eat and be satisfied; those who seek the Lord will praise him— may your hearts live forever!

27 All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations will bow down before him,

28 for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.

29 All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—
those who cannot keep themselves alive.

30 Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord.

31 They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!

Reflection Questions

Re-read the Psalm and make a list of anything that is confusing or doesn't make sense.

In your own words, describe the tone of this Psalm. What are some keywords from the Psalm that support your description?

Psalm 28:7 says, "The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him." If our joy is found in the Lord, then how is it possible to feel rejected by God—joyless—as described in Psalm 22?

This Psalm was quoted by Jesus when he was on the cross (see Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34) and many of the people standing at the foot of the cross would have been familiar with the entire Psalm. Why do you think Jesus chose this Psalm?

What comments does this Psalmist make about the past? In your opinion, why does he make them?

What is the trouble the Psalmist is facing? What is his complaint to God?

Have you ever felt like God was “far” or that your heart has turned to “wax?” Do you resonate or identify with any of the feelings expressed in this passage? If so, describe the situation and how God helped. If you currently in this season, describe the situation and how you feel God needs to help.

When you are in trouble, what is your typical first response? Where do you turn to find strength?

The last words of this Psalm are, “he has done it!” According to this Psalm, what has God done?

In your own life, what has God done, where has he shown up faithfully and miraculously?

What commitments and promises does the psalmist make to God? How does he plan on expressing his faith? On a practical level, what could this look like in your day to day life?

The psalmist says two times: “Do not be far from me” (22:11, 19). Since God is everywhere—omnipresent—all the time, what does this mean?

For you personally, where is the hope in this psalm? Why does it matter, for you personally, that we can bring a lament or complaint to God in prayer?

As you conclude your study and reflection of this Psalm, what verse or phrase stands out as the most meaningful for you personally? Explain why.

LESSON 6

1. Get started with prayer. Ask God (a) to clean your heart, confess your sins and guilt, (b) to prepare your heart to hear his voice, and (c) to keep your heart focused and distraction free.
2. Read the Bible passage. Read it all the way through two to three times. Use the space below to make some general observations and think through the overall meaning.

Psalm 84

- 1 How lovely is your dwelling place,
 O Lord Almighty!
- 2 My soul yearns, even faints,
 for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh cry out
 for the living God.
- 3 Even the sparrow has found a home,
 and the swallow a nest for herself,
 where she may have her young—
 a place near your altar,
 O Lord Almighty, my King and my God.
- 4 Blessed are those who dwell in your house;
 they are ever praising you.
- 5 Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
 who have set their hearts on pilgrimage.
- 6 As they pass through the **Valley of Baca**²,
 they make it a place of springs;
 the autumn rains also cover it with pools.
- 7 They go from strength to strength,
 till each appears before God in Zion.
- 8 Hear my prayer, O Lord God Almighty;
 listen to me, O God of Jacob.
- 9 Look upon our shield, O God;
 look with favor on your anointed one.
- 10 Better is one day in your courts
 than a thousand elsewhere;
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
 than dwell in the tents of the wicked.
- 11 For the Lord God is a sun and shield;
 the Lord bestows favor and honor;
no good thing does he withhold
 from those whose walk is blameless.
- 12 O Lord Almighty,
 blessed is the man who trusts in you.

² Valley of Baca: "... can best be taken as a symbolical expression "weeping" or "deep sorrow" The Anchor Bible Dictionary (Vol. 1, Page 566).

Reflection Questions

Re-read the Psalm and make a list of anything that is confusing or doesn't make sense.

This psalm begins with a strong declaration of hope: “How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.” In your own words, as if you were explaining to a child or young adult, how would you define hope?

How does having an eternal perspective—thinking about heaven and eternity with God—make an impact on the present?

What are the things you hope for the most? What do you look forward to for each day? For next month? The next year?

Do you feel like you spend enough time looking forward to heaven? Is it possible to for a person to be too preoccupied with heaven? Explain.

Using specific words from this Psalm, describe the tone and attitude of the psalmist.

Why does the Psalmist talk about the sparrow? What is his point with this imagery?

What do you think it means to go from “strength to strength?”

Consider what it means to be a pilgrim: how has your faith been like a journey? Where did you start? What progress have you made? What have been some major milestones, roadblocks, setbacks, and detours? Is it time for you to “get back on the road” and moving forward again?

“Bless” is a relational word, one person is the giver of the blessing and the other person is the recipient. Another word for blessed is benefited. How does a person benefit when they trust in God? What benefits do you see in this Psalm, and what benefits have you seen in your life?

For you personally, how is this Psalm challenging?

As you conclude your study and reflection of this Psalm, what verse or phrase stands out as the most meaningful for you personally? Explain why.

LESSON 7

1. Get started with prayer. Ask God (a) to clean your heart, confess your sins and guilt, (b) to prepare your heart to hear his voice, and (c) to keep your heart focused and distraction free.
2. Read the Bible passage. Read it all the way through two to three times. Use the space below to make some general observations and think through the overall meaning.

PSALM 32

- 1 Blessed is the one
 whose transgressions are forgiven,
 whose sins are covered.
- 2 Blessed is the one
 whose sin the Lord does not count against them
 and in whose spirit is no deceit.
- 3 When I kept silent,
 my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.
- 4 For day and night
 your hand was heavy on me;
 my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.
- 5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you
 and did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord."
 And you forgave the guilt of my sin.
- 6 Therefore let all the faithful pray to you
 while you may be found;
surely the rising of the mighty waters
 will not reach them.
- 7 You are my hiding place;
 you will protect me from trouble
 and surround me with songs of deliverance.
- 8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
 I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.
- 9 Do not be like the horse or the mule,
 which have no understanding
 but must be controlled by bit and bridle
 or they will not come to you.
- 10 Many are the woes of the wicked,
 but the Lord's unfailing love
 surrounds the one who trusts in him.
- 11 Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous;
 sing, all you who are upright in heart!

Reflection Questions

Re-read the Psalm and make a list of anything that is confusing or doesn't make sense.

Based on this Psalm, what are the benefits the person blessed by God receives?

In verses 1 and 2, "sin" is connected with "deceit." Aren't there other sins besides deceit? Does God only forgive deceit? Why do you think just this one was mentioned?

Why is it a blessing to have sin forgiven? In your own life, how has forgiveness made an impact?

Verses 3-5 talk about two different approaches in "handling" with our sin / deceit. What is each way, and what are the results?

Why does this passage describe physical effects that happen when a person doesn't deal with sin? Is this what really happens or is it just a metaphor?

Since God already knows everything, why do we need to confess our sins to him?

When you allow sin to go unchecked and unconfessed in your life, what happens to you personally? Is there any change in your life—thoughts, decisions, relationships—if so, what is it?

Is the “covering” in verse 1 the same as the “covering” in verse 5? Why is it good for the sin to be covered in one verse, but not the other?

In verse 6, this Psalm encourages the godly to pray while God can still be found. What does this mean? Can't we always return to God? Since God is loving, won't we always be able to find him?

Explain the metaphor of the horse and mule in verse 9. What is the point of this word picture?

As you conclude your study and reflection of this Psalm, what verse or phrase stands out as the most meaningful for you personally? Explain why.

LESSON 8

1. Get started with prayer. Ask God (a) to clean your heart, confess your sins and guilt, (b) to prepare your heart to hear his voice, and (c) to keep your heart focused and distraction free.

2. Read the Bible passage. Read it all the way through two to three times. Use the space below to make some general observations and think through the overall meaning.

PSALM 116

- 1 I love the Lord, for he heard my voice;
 he heard my cry for mercy.
- 2 Because he turned his ear to me,
 I will call on him as long as I live.
- 3 The cords of death entangled me,
 the anguish of the grave came over me;
 I was overcome by distress and sorrow.
- 4 Then I called on the name of the Lord:
 “Lord, save me!”
- 5 The Lord is gracious and righteous;
 our God is full of compassion.
- 6 The Lord protects the unwary;
 when I was brought low, he saved me.
- 7 Return to your rest, my soul,
 for the Lord has been good to you.
- 8 For you, Lord, have delivered me from death,
 my eyes from tears,
 my feet from stumbling,
- 9 that I may walk before the Lord
 in the land of the living.
- 10 I trusted in the Lord when I said,
 “I am greatly afflicted”;
- 11 in my alarm I said,
 “Everyone is a liar.”
- 12 What shall I return to the Lord
 for all his goodness to me?
- 13 I will lift up the cup of salvation
 and call on the name of the Lord.
- 14 I will fulfill my vows to the Lord
 in the presence of all his people.
- 15 Precious in the sight of the Lord
 is the death of his faithful servants.
- 16 Truly I am your servant, Lord;
 I serve you just as my mother did;
 you have freed me from my chains.
- 17 I will sacrifice a thank offering to you
 and call on the name of the Lord.
- 18 I will fulfill my vows to the Lord
 in the presence of all his people,
- 19 in the courts of the house of the Lord—
 in your midst, Jerusalem.

Praise the Lord.

Reflection Questions

Re-read the Psalm and make a list of anything that is confusing or doesn't make sense.

What motivates this Psalmist to love God and praise him?

Re-read this Psalm and make a list of the attributes and actions of God.

With the list you just made, did you discover anything new about God's character? What is most comforting?

Describe a time in your life when you were overcome with "trouble and sorrow." What happened? What did you do? Did you turn first to God for help? Did you only rely on your own strengths?

How can verse 7 be powerful for your life?

Verse 12 makes it clear that we cannot repay God for his good gifts. Why then, do we sometimes feel entitled or deserving of what we want? What moves us from being recipients of a free gift to feeling like we've earned a wage from God?

One verse is repeated in this Psalm. Which is it and why do you think this verse was repeated?

This Psalm speaks about God's goodness and the Psalmist's obedience. Based on this Psalm and your own experience, what are the connections between God's good gifts and our good works?

For you personally, what would it mean for you to "fulfill your vows" to the Lord (verse 14 and 18)? Have you made any commitments to him that you need to "make good" on?

How does this Psalm challenge or encourage you to worship God better?

God shows up so powerfully in this Psalm, yet in Lament Psalms, God's power seems to be absent. How can these be reconciled?

As you conclude your study and reflection of this Psalm, what verse or phrase stands out as the most meaningful for you personally? Explain why.

CONGRATULATIONS!

WAY TO GO! You've completed this Root Works Bible Study on the Psalms! You should celebrate! Let me know you've finished so I can celebrate with you: matt.mcgill@newlifepismo.com.

It is my prayer that the time you spent in God's Word has led you into a deeper and more meaningful relationship with Jesus.

Here's the challenge: don't stop now. You've studied at eight Psalms in this workbook, there are 142 more Psalms for you to consider. Don't be overwhelmed! You have a lifetime to explore all of God's Word. Make a commitment to spend a little time each day with God in prayer and reading his Word.

