

LEADER GUIDE

PSALMS



THE CHARACTER OF GOD

JANUARY BIBLE STUDY 2022

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LIFE BY DESIGN

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

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

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

We need a remedy—some good news. Because of His love, God did not leave us in our brokenness. Jesus, God in human flesh, came to us and lived perfectly according to God's design. Jesus came to rescue us—to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He took our sin and shame to the cross, paying the penalty of our sin by His death. Jesus was then raised from the

dead—to provide the only way for us to be rescued and restored to a relationship with God (John 3:16; Col. 2:14; and 1 Cor. 15:3-4).

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

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

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

MEET THE WRITERS

DR. KON HWON YANG is a professor of Old Testament Studies at Gateway Seminary in Ontario, California. He began his service as the seminary's dean of students in 1993. Upon completion of his degree, he was elected to a faculty position in 1997. He now teaches Old Testament, Hebrew and spiritual formation at the Los Angeles campus where his wife Patricia serves as Gateway's digital services librarian. Professor Yang's academic interest and specialties include Old Testament spirituality, wisdom literature, and spirituality of the Psalms. He has written and presented articles and papers on various Old Testament topics in both popular and scholarly venues.

AMY SUMMERS wrote the suggested teaching plans for this study. Amy is a graduate of Baylor University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has written for Lifeway Christian Resources for many years. Amy and her husband Stephen live in Belmont, North Carolina where they lead a small group of people who are committed to loving one another and serving Christ in community and where she leads a women's Bible study. Parents of three young adults, Amy and Stephen are elated to recently become grandparents to twins.

DR. MATT PEARSON wrote the preaching guide. Matt has served in pastoral ministry for over 20 years and currently serves as the Campus & Teaching Pastor at The Church at West Franklin. Originally from North Alabama, Matt graduated from Auburn University (1999) before receiving a Masters Degree (Expository Preaching) from the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (2004) and a PhD (Preaching/Practical Theology) from the Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary (2009). He loves spending time with his 3 children, Luke, Seth, and Birti, going on dates with his wife, Katie, drinking coffee, and watching Auburn football.

TEACHING PLANS





YOUR NOTES

GOD REVEALS HIS CHARACTER THROUGH HIS SON

BEFORE THE SESSION:

a. Read the Introduction and Chapter 1 of both the Personal Study Guide (PSG, pp. 4-22) and the Expository Notes in this Leader Guide (LG, pp. 24-34).

b. Make copies of **Teaching Item 1: Yesterday, Today, and Forever** and **Teaching Item 2: Jesus Is My Shepherd** (or make provisions to display that item).

c. Have Personal Study Guides, extra Bibles, and writing instruments available.

d. Conduct an Internet search for “phrases that get lost in translation.” Compile a list of idioms in foreign languages (that don’t translate well into English).

LEADING THE SESSION:

1. Point out that idioms in one language usually don’t translate well into other languages. Brainstorm some American figures of speech that get lost in translation. (Samples: Kick the bucket, between a rock and a hard place, jump on the bandwagon, quit cold turkey, raining cats and dogs.) Relay from your Internet search some idioms from other languages that just don’t translate into English.

Declare **it can be confusing, even frustrating, when something doesn’t translate.** Relate from the Personal Study Guide (p. 10) the illustration of Robert who was “discouraged and frustrated with

the lack of vitality and relevance” in his Christian life. His salvation experience was genuine, but that experience did not translate into living a victorious Christian life.

Urge participants to take a moment to conduct a personal spiritual checkup using **Does it Translate?** (PSG, p. 13). After allowing them time to consider their spiritual condition, note that Christians may recognize their salvation is not translating into a vital, relevant Christian life. Say: **That is not a reason for despair or discouragement, but for determination to gain a deeper understanding of our salvation so we can live it out fully.**

Ask: **What might many people think is the purpose of being saved?** Invite a volunteer to read Romans 8:29-30. Ask: **How might those verses enhance our understanding of the purpose and experience of salvation?** Explain the salvation experience is not a one-time event in the past, but a full-life experience with past, present, and future implications. Emphasize the three tenses of salvation (PSG, pp. 11-12). Assert the purpose of salvation is not just to gain forgiveness so we can eventually go to heaven, but to be restored to relationship with God so we can live in His presence and live out His character in a fallen world.

Invite a volunteer to read the paragraph in the Introduction to this study beginning with “**Many Christians lack an awareness of the presence of God.**” (PSG, p. 4). Point out that Psalms is the most comprehensive systematic theology one could read on the character of God (PSG, p. 4). Assert: **What**

we will discover about the character of God can definitely translate to our life experiences, because the better we know God's character, the better we know God, and the better we know God, the more we become like Him and demonstrate His character in the world.

Distribute **Teaching Item 1: Yesterday, Today, and Forever**. State the three psalms we will examine in this session, written centuries before Jesus walked this Earth, amazingly reflect the past, present, and future dimensions of our salvation. We won't be engaging in an in-depth study of each verse, but focusing on evidences of God's unchanging character that are revealed through His Son. Recognizing and availing ourselves of those qualities can translate into victorious Christian lives.

2. Note from the Expository Notes (LG, p. 28) that Psalm 22 doesn't just teach us how to cry out to God honestly and faithfully in our suffering, it reveals the character of God through Christ's sacrifice at Calvary. Invite volunteers to read aloud verses from **Psalm 22** that make them think of Jesus's crucifixion. **Read aloud Psalm 22:27-31**. Guide the group to analyze how those verses refer to Jesus's sacrifice as well. Declare: **What "he has done" (v. 31) in His death on the cross means that believers have been saved from the penalty of sin.**

Ask what the psalmist determined to do in Psalm 22:22. Explain proclaiming God's name means declaring His character. Ask: **What character qualities of God are revealed to you in this Psalm that so accurately describes Jesus's crucifixion?** Encourage learners to record those qualities on **Teaching Item 1: Yesterday, Today, and Forever**. Use the Personal Study Guide (p. 14) to explain what God's providence

is and emphasize how it is so evident in Psalm 22.

Note that some may find it strange or troubling to think of Jesus crying out Psalm 22:1 from the cross. Ask: **How might Jesus's cry actually been a declaration of faith in God's providence?** Refer to A Closer Look (PSG, p. 21) as the group discusses that question.

Guide the group to consider how this Psalm could have affirmed God's providence to the disciples who witnessed Jesus's crucifixion. Ask: **How can Psalm 22 affirm God's providence to us in situations in which we might feel God has abandoned us?** Declare it is vital to realize this psalm moves from suffering to praise, which is what every believer can do because of our personal relationship with God through Christ.

3. Say: **Because Jesus, in God's providence and mercy, laid down His life for us on the cross, He saved us from the penalty of sin. But there's more. We are being saved in the present from the power of sin. That present aspect of our salvation is beautifully expressed in Psalm 23. We can know God better and experience His presence in a richer, fuller way as we see His character revealed through His Son as our Shepherd.**

Distribute or display **Teaching Item 2: Jesus Is My Shepherd**. Use that chart and the Expository Notes (LG, p. 30) to present a brief lecture comparing the shepherd in Psalm 23 to Jesus's description of Himself as the Good Shepherd in John 10.

Invite volunteers to identify benefits and provisions believers can enjoy because Jesus is our Good Shepherd. Next, guide the group to identify character qualities of God that are revealed in those benefits and

provisions. Encourage learners to record those divine qualities on Teaching Item 1: Yesterday, Today, and Forever.

Ask: **How are we to live in response to God's revelation of His character through His Son as our shepherd?** Emphasize: We are not on our own to live out our salvation; our life is now the life of Christ, our Good Shepherd within us (PSG, p. 18) and so we now live in submission to Him, allowing Him, as our shepherd, to guide, empower, nurture and provide for us.

4. Briefly review that Psalm 22 reveals God's character through Jesus's death that saved us from the **penalty** of sin, and Psalm 23 reveals God's character as Jesus our shepherd is saving us from the **power** of sin. Now we will see that Psalm 24 reveals God's character in the eternal reign of His Son where we will be saved from the **presence** of sin.

Lead a discussion with: **What question is the psalmist really asking in Psalm 24:3?** (Sample answers: Who can go to heaven? Who can be in God's presence for all eternity?) **How does the psalmist answer his question in verse 4? Is that good or bad news for us? Explain.**

Explain from the Expository Notes that: Climbing the mountain of the Sovereign Lord and standing in God's holy place was an act of privilege and blessing that only qualified ones were allowed to do (LG, p. 33). Ask: **What might people mistakenly think qualifies them to go to heaven and be in God's presence? What is the only way we can have clean hands and a pure heart?** Affirm that we are not righteous or

pure in our own deeds, but are made pure and worthy of eternal life because the blood of Christ has washed away our sins. It is in Him that we stand righteous before the Father.

Declare: It is that truth that enables us to eagerly and confidently look forward to Christ's return. **Invite a volunteer to read those Psalm 24:7-10.** Use the Expository Notes (LG, p. 34) and A Closer Look (PSG, p. 21) to explain those verses in their historical context and make application to believers' lives today.

Ask participants **what qualities of God's character they see revealed in the return and eternal reign of His Son.** Encourage them to record responses on **Teaching Item 1: Yesterday, Today, and Forever.**

Invite someone to read the last paragraph in the PSG beginning with: The fact is the Son of God paid the penalty of our sins (p. 18). Request learners complete **A Triumphant Translation** (PSG, p. 20). Invite one or two volunteers to share their descriptions. Assert if we don't feel the descriptions that we recorded apply to us, we must remind ourselves of the character of God that can transform us. Encourage learners to review God's character qualities they recorded on **Teaching Item 1: Yesterday, Today, and Forever.** Ask: **How could recognizing and trusting in these qualities translate into a more victorious, vibrant Christian life?**

Close in prayer, thanking God for revealing Himself and saving us through His Son, and asking that He empower learners to live out the fullness of their salvation experience.



EXPERIENCE GOD'S COMPASSION AND FORGIVENESS

BEFORE THE SESSION:

a. Read Chapter 2 in the Personal Study Guide (PSG, pp. 23-34) and the Expository Notes in this Leader Guide (LG, pp. 35-40).

b. Make copies of **Teaching Item 3: Psalms of Repentance** and **Restoration** and **Teaching Item 4: What Can Wash Away My Sin?**

c. Have Personal Study Guides, Bibles, and writing instruments available.

LEADING THE SESSION:

1. Remark that, in the last session, the group considered things that are difficult to translate; today you want to consider things that are difficult to explain. Invite one or two volunteers to explain, with words only, how to skip. Then request learners rate on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being most difficult) how difficult it would be for them to explain to someone how to cast a show from a streaming app from a smartphone to a television. State: **Some things are just hard to explain.**

Relate the PSG illustration of the well-respected Christian leader convicted of fraud and read the question: **How do we explain sin—blatant, obvious sin—in those who not only know Christ, but are devoted to serving Him?** (PSG, p. 23-24). Ask: **Why is it important to at least try to explain how godly people fail?** Point out we need to be able to understand the anatomy of sin and our vulnerability to it.

Assert: It's also important to be able to explain how we can experience God's forgiveness and compassion when we do sin. David was a devoted follower of God, yet he sinned in dramatic, devastating ways. Briefly detail David's sins. Two Psalms David wrote after his epic failure provide a model for us to follow when we sin, and they show us that God's character is revealed in the conviction, confession, and cleansing of sin. Distribute **Teaching Item 3: Psalms of Restoration and Repentance.**

2. Stress David's conviction was due to his relationship with God. Designate half the group Team A and the other half Team B. Instruct Team A to read Psalm 32 on **Teaching Item 3: Psalms of Restoration and Repentance** and underline indications David was under conviction, and Team B do the same with Psalm 51. Invite volunteers to read what they underlined. Explain David used figurative expressions like "My bones became brittle" (Ps. 32:3), to convey the emotional and physical condition of suffering under unconfessed sin. David was not just convicted of his specific sin, but of his sin nature. Use the Expository Notes (LG, p. 38) to speak on Psalm 51:5.

Ask: **How was David's pain an indication of God's mercy?** Then **Read 2 Corinthians 7:10.** Guide the group to contrast condemnation and conviction. Note that condemnation is from Satan and burdens people with guilt, so we live in slavery to regret, failure, and hopelessness. Conviction is from God. It reveals

His character of holiness, justice, and compassion, and is intended to restore us to fellowship.

3. State sometimes we may feel more selfish sorrow over what sin has done to us rather than godly sorrow over what our sin has done to God's reputation and our relationship with Him. God wants us to move past selfish sorrow, so He allows us to suffer the consequences until conviction compels us to come to Him in repentance and confession (PSG, p. 28).

Instruct learners to circle on **Teaching Item 3: Psalms of Repentance and Restoration** every occurrence of the word "my" in Psalm 32:5 and Psalm 51:2-3. Ask: **What was David doing with these statements?** (taking ownership of what he'd done). Use the Expository Notes (LG, p. 35) to explain the three terms David used to detail the nature of sin.

Invite a volunteer to **read Psalm 51:4**. Evaluate how David could make that statement when he'd obviously sinned against so many people. Emphasize: Sin can destroy one's life, one's family, and one's God-called ministry, but we cannot comprehend how severely it grieves God and crushes His heart.

Request learners consult Psalm 32:5 and state how David responded to God's conviction. Explain the meaning of confess (PSG, p. 29). State: **Sometimes when we talk to God about our sin, we say things like, "I'm sorry God, but he...but she...but You." True confession has no "buts" or excuses. We agree with God that it is sin.**

Explain Psalm 32 is a didactic psalm (intended to teach and give moral instruction) that urges readers to choose confession over cover-ups. Direct attention to Psalm 32:9-10 and ask: **How does David describe a person who won't confess at all,**

or who confesses with excuses? Why does he tell us not to be like this? Note David used stubborn animals to urge God's people to be quick to submit and surrender to the Lord (LG, p. 36). That requires confession and repentance.

4. Instruct learners to draw a heart around Psalm 51:10-12 on **Teaching Item 3: Psalms of Restoration and Repentance**. Ask: **What was the heart of the matter for David?** To gain a clean heart, David pled for forgiveness. Read Psalm 51:1-2,7. Request learners identify God's character qualities David appealed to for forgiveness. Read 1 John 1:9. Use the PSG (p. 31) to emphasize the implications of the word "all" in that verse. Distribute **Teaching Item 4: What Can Wash Away My Sin?** to highlight the messianic overtones in David's prayer for forgiveness. All David could do, all we can do, was confess and ask for forgiveness with a broken, humble heart and God responded.

Instruct Team A to bracket in Psalm 32 verses that describe the results of being forgiven and cleansed by God. Instruct Team B to do the same with Psalm 51. Invite volunteers to summarize the verses they bracketed in two or three words.

Recall that some things are hard to explain, but experiencing God's forgiveness is something that we can, and must, explain how to do. Discuss Keys to Cleansing (PSG, p. 30) as a means to review what Psalms 32 and 51 reveal about **conviction, confession, and cleansing**. Add to the discussion with the Expository Notes discussion on the three keys to experiencing God's forgiveness (LG, p. 40).

Encourage adults to underline the paragraph that begins, "So in conclusion, conviction and confession" (PSG, p. 32)" Close in prayer.



GOD CAN BE TRUSTED EVEN IN DARK TIMES

BEFORE THE SESSION:

a. Read Chapter 3 in both the Personal Study Guide (PSG, pp. 35-46) and the Expository Notes in this Leader Guide (LG, pp. 41-46).

b. Make copies of **Teaching Item 5: A Guide in the Dark**. Prepare to display, or make copies of, **Teaching Item 6: The Distance Between Mountains**.

c. Have Personal Study Guides, extra Bibles, and writing instruments available.

d. Have a water bottle or glass of ice water on hand.

LEADING THE SESSION:

Ask adults if they, or their children, were afraid of the dark when they were young. Ask: What were reasons for that fear? What did you do to help dispel that fear? Ask: **What are questions people ask, or conclusions they make, about God in dark times?** Use the PSG (pp. 35-36) to elaborate on questions and conclusions people make about God in times of tragedy.

Urge volunteers to recall from the first two chapters of this study some character qualities of God that were revealed in the Psalms the group examined. Ask if adults agree with the PSG (p. 36) that: It is easy to lose perspective on the nature and character of God when we are going through the darkness of adversity and times of suffering, and if so, why.

Say: **We may have all at some point asked, Where is God when it is dark?**

This study examines two psalms of lament in which the psalmist honestly admits to being in the dark night of the soul and he questioned where God was. Use the PSG (p. 36) and Expository Notes (p. 41) to explain why many believe Psalms 42 and 43 may have originally been one psalm. As we examine these psalms as one, we can follow the psalmist's journey of faith as he expresses his complaint, but also expresses his confidence that God can be trusted, even in dark times.

2. Distribute **Teaching Item 5: A Guide in the Dark** to use as a guide for this study. Draw attention to the first question and request learners write their responses in the space provided on **Teaching Item 5: A Guide in the Dark** as you read aloud Psalms 42 and 43. Invite volunteers to share their responses. Use the Expository Notes under **Acknowledging the Presence of Problems** (LG, p. 44) to address the issue of doubt and depression in Christians.

Invite responses to the second question on **Teaching Item 5: A Guide in the Dark**. Encourage learners to record responses on their guide in the space provided. State that besides feeling troubled and taunted by deceitful and unjust people, the psalmist was depressed because he felt so far from God. Display or distribute copies of **Teaching Item 6: The Distance Between Mountains**. Point out the locations of Jerusalem, where the house of God

represented His presence to the people, Mt. Hermon, and the Jordan River. **Explain the psalmist longed to be with God on His holy mountain in Jerusalem (Ps. 43:3).** It's possible the psalmist was physically away from God's house and presence and was in the mountains of northern Israel, at Mt. Hermon from which the Jordan River flows. Regardless, he was feeling really distant from God.

Determine reasons Christians feel far from God. Point out that sometimes our own choices distance us from God (see PSG, p. 39 – second paragraph under Confidence in God's Faithfulness), but sometimes God allows us to go through dark times with no awareness of His presence in order to draw us even closer to Him.

Discuss question 3 on **Teaching Item 5: A Guide in the Dark**, once again encouraging learners to record answers in the space provided. Note that what the psalmist most desperately desired, beyond God's vindication and rescue, was God Himself. **Invite a volunteer to read Psalm 42:1-2.** Then **display the water bottle or glass of ice water.** Instruct learners to think about times they have been extremely thirsty. Ask: **How do you feel when you're extremely thirsty? Why are you grateful to feel the discomfort of thirst?** Just as physical thirst is a gift that prompts us to drink life-giving water, dark times are a gift that prompt us to seek the life-giving presence of God.

Guide the group to determine ways we seek God's presence. Ask rhetorically: **But what about times when we do pray and read our Bibles and worship with God's people and yet we still feel a sense of separation from God?** If you have ever experienced that reality, you perhaps can identify with the psalmist's emotional dejection and turmoil. Relate the differing

interpretations of Psalm 42:6-7 from the PSG (p. 38) and the Expository Notes (LG, p. 42). Regardless of whether the psalmist was using the billows of winds and waves to illustrate his troubles or God's presence, the ultimate truth was that they made him aware of God's faithful love. Use the Expository Notes (p. 42) to speak briefly on *hesed* (God's faithful love). State: The question for us is whether we are going to allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by our dark times or by God's faithful love.

3. Ask: **How do you feel about the psalmist's honesty in expressing his emotions and complaints? What are reasons you feel that way?** Emphasize God is not offended when His people talk honestly to Him both in pain and in praise (LG, p. 45).

Explain psalms of lament express complaints, but usually express confidence as well. Ask: **How can complaints to the Lord actually reflect a faith that is confident in God's faithfulness?** Discuss question 4 on **Teaching Item 5: A Guide in the Dark**, encouraging learners to **record responses on their guide.** Note that, just as David's relationship with God prompted him to experience conviction and cleansing of sin in Psalms 32 and 51 (examined in the last chapter), this psalmist finds confidence in his relationship with God as well. Request learners indicate what the psalmist called God in Psalms 42:5, 8-9, 11, and 43:2, 4-5.

State when we mistakenly assume that being a Christian exempts us from suffering, we can be blindsided when adversity comes and suffer doubt and dejection. Dark times compel us to consider what is really God of our lives. Discuss *The God of My Life* (PSG, p. 39). Say: **When dark times reveal what is**

really god in our lives, we must acknowledge our self-sufficiency is a sham and that our only real hope is the living God.

State the psalmist repeated the refrain of his dual reality of adversity along with hope in God's faithfulness in Psalms 42:5, 11, and 43:5 because each experience of trials and anxiety served to bring the psalmist back to God as the source of hope (PSG, p. 40). Like the psalmist, we must allow God to intervene in order to control our attitudes and emotions and give us hope (PSG, p. 40).

Guide the group to contrast the world's definition of hope with the biblical implication of the word "hope" (PSG, p. 40). Emphasize worldly hope is based on wishes for what might happen; biblical hope is a future certainty based on God's character.

4. Direct attention to Psalm 43:4-5. Ask the fifth question on **Teaching Item 5: A Guide in the Dark**, once again encouraging adults to write responses in the space provided. Note from the PSG (p. 44) that trusting and praising God in dark times is no more confidently expressed than in the short Old Testament Book of Habakkuk. Explain the prophet Habakkuk lived in dark times. Within the nation of Judah there was violence, injustice, strife, and oppression, while outside the nation loomed the even more violent and wicked

Babylonians, ready to swoop in and wipe them out. Yet Habakkuk chose to live by faith in God's character and His promises, and that determination compelled him to praise God in the dark. Invite someone to read Habakkuk 3:17-19 from Praising God in the Dark (PSG, p. 43). Encourage adults to use that activity to write their own hymn of praise.

Ask: **How can praising God in the dark give us victory over despair?** Point out from the PSG that praising God reminds us that hope and victory are not in our own strength, even in our capacity to fortify our faith, but ... in the nature of God (p. 42). Assert praising God helps us recall who He is, what He has done in the past, and what He will do in the future.

Use the Expository Notes (LG, pp. 43-44) to comment on the psalmist's final request to "send your light and your truth" in Psalm 43:3. Remind learners that Jesus is the light (John 8:12) and the truth (John 14:6). Declare: Jesus leads us into God's presence. Jesus is our hope. It is through Jesus that we can trust and praise God, even in the dark times. Urge any participant who is unsure of their relationship with God through Christ, or wants to know how to enter into that relationship, to speak with you after the session. Close in prayer.



YOUR NOTES

GOD'S GOODNESS CAN BE SEEN IN HIS JUSTICE AND MERCY

BEFORE THE SESSION:

a. Read Chapter 4 in the Personal Study Guide (PSG, pp. 47-58) and the Expository Notes in this Leader Guide (LG, pp. 47-53).

b. Prepare to display or make copies of **Teaching Item 7: Asaph and the Psalms**.

c. Have Personal Study Guides, extra Bibles, and writing instruments available.

d. Obtain two medium to large cardboard boxes. Write EITHER on the front of one box and JUSTICE on the back. Write OR on the front of the other box and MERCY on the back. Display boxes at the front of the meeting space with the fronts (EITHER and OR) showing.

LEADING THE SESSION:

1. Draw attention to the two boxes. Encourage the group to identify polar opposites they would categorize as going into either one box or the other. (Examples: Either Light or Dark; Dead or Alive; Hot or Cold.) Point out many people consider justice and mercy to be polar opposites. They believe there can either be **justice**—when people get what they deserve. Or there can be **mercy**—when people don't get what they deserve. That perception causes them to misunderstand God's nature of being both just and merciful. Declare: The truth is that God doesn't fit into our boxes. **His goodness can be seen in His justice and His mercy; there is no either/or.**

The Psalms of Asaph can help learners see the lack of contradiction in God's character of justice and mercy. Display or distribute **Teaching Item 7: The Psalms and Asaph** and provide a brief overview of the Psalms, Asaph, and psalms of lament.

Note the Psalms are an invitation to be honest with God. Encourage learners to be honest as they consider the Reflection questions on page 58 of the PSG: **What was a time or situation when you were angry with God, or at least impatient, and felt He was responsible for allowing you to be treated unjustly?**

2. Encourage learners to consult the first paragraph under "**Justice: Punishment or Consequences**" and explain what justice looked like under the Jewish legal system (PSG, p. 48). Note the PSG writer urges us to consider whether God responded to Israel's sin and rebellion with just punishment, or simply withheld His merciful protection and let them suffer the consequences of their actions (PSG, pp. 48-49).

Invite a volunteer to **read Psalm 73:1**. Determine the opposite, negative truths implied in this verse (see PSG, p. 49). State that misunderstanding God's nature of justice can raise a lot of questions. Guide the group to complete **I've Got Some Questions** (PSG, p. 51). Ask: **When might we ask some of these questions?** Read the PSG paragraph on p. 49 beginning with It is common for people to feel the same way today. **Request volunteers read**

Psalm 73:2-5, 21-22. Ask: **What happens when we try to answer all our questions about God's justice with a limited understanding of divine justice?**

Invite a volunteer to read **Psalm 73:16-19.** Ask: **What brought hope and understanding to the psalmist?** Declare: God, in His mercy and justice, doesn't allow His people to get away with indulging in this world's sinful pleasures like the wicked do because He knows that will destroy us. When He allows us to suffer consequences, He is being just and merciful toward us.

3. State the saying "Justice delayed is justice denied" puts justice in an either/or box. Point out that we have a tendency to tell God how He should exact justice, and we want Him to do it now! Explain that's what the psalmists did in the "precatory" Psalms. **Invite three volunteers to read Psalms 74:11, 79:6, and 83:13-15.**

Consider why psalms of imprecation make us uncomfortable. Say: **Since Jesus came to fulfill and not discard all the Old Testament, His followers need to learn how to understand and apply the precatory psalms.** We must take them in their specific context, understanding what they meant then before trying to apply them now. We must also understand they are poetry and therefore expressed extravagantly and dramatically. It's important to realize the curses are not over trivial matters; those being cursed are mocking and dishonoring God by harming His people. The precatory psalms do not seek personal vengeance; rather they are asking that God vindicate Himself so that He receives the glory He deserves. **Read Psalm 83:16-18.** Declare we also need to recognize how Jesus fulfills and transforms the psalms of imprecation. In His mercy He chose to take our shame on Himself so

we can know God.

State it could be that God's justice seems delayed because we're the ones who should be working for that justice. Invite someone to read the PSG paragraph beginning with **Rather than God wielding a big stick** (p. 53). Declare God's justice might seem delayed because He is doing something we cannot see. Declare: When God is silent in the context of suffering and injustice, it does not contradict His goodness but reminds us His ways are not our ways (PSG, p. 54). It also reminds us that His timing is not our timing. Guide the group to complete **A Matter of Timing** (PSG, p. 54). Ask: **Why should we all be grateful for God's delayed justice?**

4. Declare: Recognizing we have all received God's mercy because of His delayed justice should prompt us to do some honest remembering and reflecting on what God has done for us. **Invite a volunteer to read Psalm 77:10-15.** Reflecting on all God had done for Israel restored the psalmist's confidence in God's goodness. **Invite someone to read Psalm 78:38-39.**

Point out the psalmist's honest wrestling with God led him to the truth that God's justice and mercy are not contradictory, but compatible. They are not separated into either/or boxes, but come together in one powerful demonstration of God's goodness. **Turn the two boxes to show Justice and Mercy that are written on the back and stack them one on top of another.** Declare: God's goodness is most clearly seen in the cross where justice and mercy meet.

Note that when we remember and reflect on the goodness God has shown to us through Jesus, we can make the same determination as the psalmist. **Read Psalm 73:23-25.** Close in prayer.



YOUR NOTES

GOD'S PRESENCE OFFERED TO ALL WHO TURN TO HIM

BEFORE THE SESSION:

a. Read Chapter 5 in the Personal Study Guide (PSG, pp. 59-70) and the Expository Notes in this Leader Guide (LG, pp. 54-60).

b. Make copies of **Teaching Item 8: Pilgrimages**.

c. Have Personal Study Guides, extra Bibles, and writing instruments available.

d. Obtain hymnals, or the lyrics to the hymn **"Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus."**

LEADING THE SESSION:

1. Request learners consider times they've made a new acquaintance and discovered they share a past point of contact, perhaps they once attended the same school or lived in the same community. Ask: **What are questions you will probably start asking one another?** Above all other questions, we will probably ask: **Do you know this or that person?**

Relate the PSG writer's experience when asking people of the Islamic faith if they know God (p. 59). Encourage learners to underline the three "Christianity is the only religion" statements in the PSG (p. 60) as you read them aloud. Review how people can know God personally. Recall from Chapter 1 that a deep awareness of God's presence can translate into a vibrant, victorious Christian life.

State the Psalms of the sons of Korah express a deep longing for God's presence. Explain **the sons of Korah were gatekeepers and custodians at the temple**, dating back to the time in the wilderness when they guarded the threshold of the tent of meeting (1 Chron. 9:17-32; 26:1-10). First Chronicles 26:12 emphasizes the service the gatekeepers performed was just as important as any other leadership role in the temple. Apparently, some gatekeepers became musicians as well. In 2 Chronicles 20, when Jehoshaphat led Israel to seek God's protection against attack, it was the Korahites who led the people in a time of praise and worship (v. 19). Regardless of whether the sons of Korah were on the security team or the worship team, they spent their days serving at the temple which the Jewish people associated with God's physical presence.

In Psalms 42 and 43 (examined in Chapter 3), the sons of Korah lamented their complaints, but also expressed their confidence that God can be trusted even in the dark times. They obviously longed for God's presence. In the Psalms studied in this chapter, the sons of Korah urge people to turn to God so they can once again experience an awareness of His presence.

2. Assert we should want to be in God's presence because that's where the joy is. Invite a volunteer to read Psalm 84:1-4. Ask who the psalmist said was happy. Explain the term happy refers to a sense of joy and satisfaction in one's state or circumstances. Note one reason the psalmist said those

who reside in God's house are happy is because the joy of God's presence comes due to the security we have in Him (PSG, p. 62). He used the image of birds building their nests in the temple eaves to emphasize we are welcomed to, and secure in, God's presence. Evaluate how the names used to refer to God in Psalm 84:1-4 emphasize the security God's people have in Him.

Ask: Why is praising God continually a powerful way to experience the joy of His presence? Explain *Selah* is a musical term, possibly calling for a moment of silence. *Selah* invites us to pause and think for a minute. Encourage learners to complete Pause and Praise (PSG, p. 61). Inquire: **How can praise and thanksgiving in these situations help us change our perspective and surrender to God's will?**

Invite someone to read Psalm 84:5-7. Note that not everyone enjoyed the privilege of continually being at the temple; some made pilgrimages from far away. Distribute **Teaching Item 8: Pilgrimages** to speak briefly on pilgrimages in Jewish life. (Since pilgrimages will be discussed again in Chapter 7 on the Psalms of Ascent, encourage learners to hang on to their copy.) **Ask: Did the happy people in Psalm 84 regard their pilgrimage as a duty or a delight? What leads you to that conclusion?** Note the pilgrims were determined to push through hard times to get to God's presence. Analyze how their determination to be in God's presence transformed their difficult situations. Use the PSG comments (pp. 62-63) and Expository Notes (LG, p. 54) on the Valley of Baca to add to the discussion. **Ask: What can help us gain new levels of strength as we go through our own valleys of weeping?**

Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 84:10-12. Ask what the psalmist would rather do

and why. Recall the sons of Korah guarded the threshold of the tent, and remark this psalmist really loved his job of humble service because it kept him in God's presence, where the joy is.

3. State that since the sons of Korah found such joy in God's presence, it should be no surprise they lamented over the loss of His presence. **Invite someone to read Psalm 85:4-5.** Determine what people are implying when they make statements like: When God feels distant, guess who moved? **Ask: So how are we to understand the psalmist's plea for God to return?** Explain a closer look at Psalm 85 reveals that it is God's people who need to return to Him, and it tells us how we can do so.

Psalm 85:1-4 calls us to remember when we did enjoy a close relationship with God. Request learners read Psalm 85:6-7 and state what we are to do when God's presence is a distant memory. **Ask: Does rejoicing in God cause revival, indicate revival, or both?** Explain your reasoning. What did the psalmist appeal to for revival and salvation? Point out from the Expository Notes (LG, p. 55) that: Nothing is quite like asking God to act according to His nature and reputation! That's why a study of God's character, such as this one from the Psalms, is so valuable.

Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 85:8-9. Ask what the psalmist said the people needed to do to return to God's presence. Refer to Closer Look (PSG, p. 66) to examine what it means to fear God and why that is essential for turning to God and coming into His presence. Use the PSG (p. 64-65) and Expository Notes (LG, p. 55-56) to present a brief lecture on the results of being revived and restored to God's presence according to Psalm 85.

Explain Psalm 86, a prayer of David in the middle of these Psalms of the sons of Korah, is an example on how to pray for restoration to God's presence. Summarize the Psalm by stating from the PSG: While initially basing his appeal on his own need and efforts, he rightly comes to the conclusion any hope of returning to a relationship with God is because of the character of God. (p. 65). **Invite someone to read Psalm 86:11-12.** Determine what results from returning to God. **Request adults silently read Psalm 86:9** and identify another important result of being restored to God's presence.

Say that all the nations having the opportunity to know God personally and experience joy in His presence is the theme of Psalm 87. Use Closer Look (PSG, p. 68) to explore the significance of the term "all nations." Note that *Selah* invites us to pause and think about why glorious things are said about the city of God (Ps. 87:3). Encourage learners to complete Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken (PSG, p. 69). Ask: **What is our role in that glorious scene taking place?** Emphasize from the PSG: Those who are restored to God's presence will be involved in God's mission to make Him known among the nations (PSG, p. 68). This is the ultimate purpose for God's presence in our lives, to fulfill His mission to the ends of the earth.

4. State the final Psalm of the sons of Korah you'll examine today has been called the saddest chapter in the Bible (PSG, p. 66). Recall that psalms of lament record words of complaint, but also confidence in God's character and promises. Psalm 88 contains many words of complaint, but no explicit statement of confidence. Explain

the possible meaning of the term *maskil* (LG, p. 41) and state this psalm provides wise instruction on how to pray to God while experiencing the seeming rejection and silence of God (LG, p. 59).

Invite someone to read Psalm 88:1-9. Request learners identify reasons the psalmist cried out to God. Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 88:10-12. Ask: **What are the implied answers to these rhetorical questions?** Use the PSG (p. 67) to explain the references to death and contrast the Jewish and Christian view of the afterlife.

State the psalmist moved from questioning God to blaming Him. **Read Psalm 88:13-18.** Ask: **Why might prayer have served to frustrate, rather than encourage and strengthen, the psalmist? Yet what did he do according to verses 1, 9, and 13? How is this psalm of great lament still a psalm of great faith?** Declare that accepting the seeming absence of God was simply not an option for the psalmist (LG, p. 54) so he kept praying and crying out to God. Tough faith keeps turning to God even when He's silent. When we express these kinds of negative feelings in prayer, we're still demonstrating faith because we're taking it to God and expressing our desperation for His presence. Read the last paragraph of the Expository Notes (LG, p. 60) beginning with "In some ways this is a very depressing psalm indeed."

Refer back to the PSG question on page 63: **Why is seeking God's presence so significant?** Read the PSG writer's response to that question. Read the lyrics to or have the group sing the hymn "Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus" (*The Baptist Hymnal* 2008 ed., p. 413). Close in prayer.



GOD'S CHARACTER AND SALVATION CALLS FOR OUR PRAISE

BEFORE THE SESSION:

- a. Read Chapter 6 in the Personal Study Guide (PSG, pp. 71-83) and the Expository Notes in this Leader Guide (LG, pp. 61-67).
- b. Make copies of **Teaching Item 9: A Cheer of Praise**.
- c. Have Personal Study Guides, extra Bibles, and writing instruments available.

LEADING THE SESSION:

1. Ask: **What do you think are most important—first words, last words, or both? Explain.** Note the first and last word of the first Psalm you'll study today is "Hallelujah!" Use the PSG (p. 72) to explain the literal meaning of the word Hallelujah and examine what it means to praise God. Declare one common characteristic of people who have a vibrant faith is their habit of constantly praising the Lord ... mindful of His presence in every situation (PSG, p. 72). The Psalms examined in this chapter call us to praise God for His character and His salvation.

Introduce Psalms 113-118 as the Egyptian Hallel Psalms traditionally sung at the Passover meal (LG, p. 61). Emphasize Jesus knew these psalms well and sang them as He celebrated Passover with His disciples. Even as Jesus predicted His betrayal and death at that Last Supper, He sang "Hallelujah!" and gave God praise, glory, and honor.

2. Psalms 113 and 114 were sung before the Passover meal. Invite someone to read Psalm 113:1-3. Guide the group to identify the What, When, and Where of praise (see LG, p. 61). In discussing the What of praise, explain praising the name of the LORD means giving Him glory for the worthiness of His character (PSG, p. 73-74).

The psalmist then declared the Why of praise. Request adults consider images that come to mind as you read aloud Psalm 113:4-9. Call for responses. Consider how those images convey the worthiness of God's character. State ancient peoples considered the weak, poor, and barren to have been abandoned by their gods; Israel praised their God for stooping down to look at the lowly, lift them up, and take away their shame. Psalm 113 praises God for His transcendence—He is enthroned on high—and His immanence—He comes near.

Psalm 114 continues the theme of a great God working on behalf of a weak people by recounting the powerful ways He acted on Israel's behalf. **Invite a volunteer to read Psalm 114.** Analyze what the images in this psalm convey about God's character. Ask: **Why is it powerful to praise God for what He has done in the past?** Read from the Expository Notes, As the worshipers recited this psalm they not only remembered God's past acts of deliverance; they also counted on God's ability to do it again in their current situation and the future (LG, p. 63). Discuss Loud Songs of Deliverance (PSG, p. 76). Declare: Nothing is too hard for God

and no one is too small for God. That is definitely a reason to say “Hallelujah!”

3. Psalms 115-118 were sung after the Passover meal. Psalm 115 urges God’s people to trust and worship God alone because He alone is worthy of that trust and worship. **Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 115:1-9.** Evaluate how the description of idols emphasizes the worthiness of God’s character (PSG, p. 78). Request learners consider the Reflection question on page 83 of the PSG: Can you identify anything, including possessions, activities, business, or ambitions that dominate your time, attention, and affections to the point of infringing on your devotion to God that could be considered idolatrous? Remark that when we identify idols in our lives, we must follow the psalmist’s example and make a renewed dedication to trust and praise God alone. Read Psalm 115:11 and 18. Evaluate how we praise God when we trust Him.

Psalm 116 is a hymn of thanksgiving for God’s personal care and deliverance. Read Psalm 116:10. Note there may have been a point in his severe affliction that the psalmist felt as dark as the sons of Korah in Psalm 88, but even then, he believed and kept crying out to God. Once he experienced God’s merciful, miraculous deliverance he praised God for who He is and what He did. **Instruct learners to silently read Psalm 116:1-8 and identify God’s character qualities and actions that are worthy of praise.**

Ask: **What question did the psalmist ask in verse 12? Is that possible? Why?** The psalmist couldn’t repay God for His goodness, but he determined to show his gratitude by telling others about God’s salvation, by continuing to call on and obey Him, and by expressing his love for God. Ask: **What is the difference between**

a thank you note and a love letter? When are both appropriate and not appropriate?

Declare Psalm 116 is a love letter. Read from the Expository Notes (LG, p. 65): A polite “thank-you” to the Lord and moving on with living just will not do. Rather, the life of the one delivered should be defined by an enthusiastic and passionate telling and retelling of the experience. Instruct learners to answer the Personal Reflection question on page 83 of the PSG: How would you complete the sentence: “I love the Lord, because...” Does your answer focus on blessings and what God has done for you, the character of God, or does it reflect a personal experiential knowledge and intimate relationship with Him?

Invite a volunteer to read Psalm 117. Use Closer Look (PSG, p. 77) to emphasize the centrality of this Psalm. Ask: **What are God’s people to do with His faithful love?** (Example: Praise Him for it. Tell the world about it so that all can have the opportunity of fulfilling their ultimate purpose of glorifying God and enjoying Him forever.)

4. As the last of the Egyptian Hallel Psalms, Psalm 118 is possibly the hymn Jesus and His disciples sang before they left for the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:30). Explain the middle portion of the Psalm is a personal testimony. Relate the psalmist’s crisis situation described in verses 10-12. **Invite a volunteer to read Psalm 118:5 and 13-14.** Emphasize from the PSG (p. 77): Of all the blessings God has poured out throughout our lifetime, of all the times He has intervened to deliver and guide us through challenging circumstances, the greatest thing He has done is to make salvation available to us and enable us as fallen sinners to know and become the righteousness of God. Each day of life

God gives us should be one of proclaiming what the Lord has done in testimony and praise. Encourage learners to complete My Testimony (PSG, p. 81).

The final portion of Psalm 118 describes a festival procession to the temple. **Invite a volunteer to read Psalm 118:19-26. Ask learners to identify messianic references in these verses.** Use the Expository Notes (LG, pp. 66-67) to add to the discussion.

Recall that first and last words are significant. Invite two volunteers to read the first

and last verses of Psalm 118. Note Psalm 118:1-4 is like a large sporting event where one section cheers and then the next section responds. Use Closer Look to explain how another Hallel psalm, Psalm 136, encourages that antiphonal response. **Distribute Teaching Item 9: A Cheer of Praise** and encourage learners to read aloud the italicized refrains to give a communal praise to God for His character and salvation.

Close in prayer.

YOUR NOTES



YOUR NOTES

GOD OFFERS HOPE TO HIS PEOPLE.

BEFORE THE SESSION:

a. Read Chapter 7 in the Personal Study Guide (PSG, pp. 84-95) and the Expository Notes in this Leader Guide (LG, pp. 68-74).

b. Make copies of Teaching Item 8: Pilgrimages and Teaching Item 10: Map of Ascents.

c. Have hymnals, Personal Study Guides, extra Bibles, and writing instruments available.

d. This teaching plan suggests hymns and worship songs for each Psalm; you may think of other songs more familiar to your learners. Look up the lyrics for your own and/or this leader guide's song suggestions. All hymn numbers are from The Baptist Hymnal, 2008 ed.

LEADING THE SESSION:

1. Ask: What would you say was absolutely essential to have on a long trip? We might decide our trip will go easier if we have somebody to travel with and good music to listen to. Ask: How are Christians on a journey? What are essentials for that journey? As we journey toward becoming more like Jesus, we need fuel for the journey, people to travel with, and hope that we're going to get there. Often, it's the songs we sing along the way that give us hope. Rhetorically ask question: Can you imagine worship without

music? Encourage learners to complete My Pilgrimage Playlist (PSG, p. 88). Use Closer Look (PSG, p. 86) to emphasize the value of diverse musical styles in worship.

The Psalms examined in this chapter emphasize God offers hope to His people as they journey toward Him. Use the PSG (p. 85), Expository Notes (LG, p. 68) and Teaching Item 8: Pilgrimages to introduce the Psalms of Ascent. Invite a volunteer to read the PSG (p. 86) paragraph beginning with: As we explore these 15 Psalms, we will see singing along the way...

2. **Invite someone to read Psalm 120.** Distribute **Teaching Item 10: Map of Ascents**. Note the people of Israel were dispersed across the known world. Ask: **Why did the pilgrims want to start this journey? How might we relate with their distress? How can distress lead to hope?** Being distressed with where we are can compel us to set off on pilgrimage toward God. Tell learners you want to encourage them to consider songs believers in Jesus sing today that correspond to each of the Psalms of Ascent. They may want to pull those songs from, or add them to, My Pilgrimage Playlist (PSG, p. 88). **To provide an example, state one Christian song that reflects the theme of Psalm 120 is the hymn "Higher Ground" #532. Read verse 2 and the refrain of that hymn.** Encourage learners to complete One Hopeful Step at a Time (PSG, p. 91) for Psalm 120.

Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 121. Consider dangers pilgrims would have faced as they journeyed toward Jerusalem.

Ask: **How could singing this Psalm give all pilgrims hope?** Read **Jude 24-25**. Encourage learners to complete One Hopeful Step at a Time (PSG, p. 91) for Psalm 121. Invite volunteers to state what songs this Psalm about God's protection makes them think of. (Perhaps read the first two verses of "O God, Our Help in Ages Past" #122.)

Invite someone to read Psalm 122:1-2.

Ask: **When you reach your destination after a long trip, what's the first thing you want to do? What did these pilgrims want to do, and why?** Read the PSG paragraph beginning with As they arrived in the gates of the city (p. 90). Ask what songs we might sing today that reflect the joy of Psalm 122. (Suggestion: "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee" #13, "Rejoice" by Dustin Kensure.) Encourage learners to complete One Hopeful Step at a Time (PSG, p. 91) for Psalm 122.

Request adults recall times they've wanted to say, "This is just too much; I've had it." Ask a volunteer to read **Psalm 123**. Determine what the pilgrims had more than enough of. Inquire: **What did the pilgrims believe about God's character that enabled them to sing this Psalm? What did that belief compel them to do?** Read **Hebrews 12:2**. Ask what songs we sing today reflect Psalm 123 (Suggestion: "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus" #413). Encourage learners to complete One Hopeful Step at a Time (PSG, p. 91) for Psalm 123.

Invite a volunteer to read **Psalm 124**. Ask: **What was the pilgrims' hope through all the dangers they experienced on their journey?** Read **Romans 8:31**. Encourage learners to complete One Hopeful Step at a Time (PSG, p. 91) for Psalm 124. Consider songs we sing today that convey the hope of Psalm 124. (Suggestion: "Our

God" by Chris Tomlin.)

3. Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 125:1-2.

Ask: **What was the pilgrims' hope?** Use the Expository Notes (LG, p. 70) to briefly lecture on this Psalm. Encourage learners to complete One Hopeful Step at a Time (PSG, p. 91) for Psalm 125. Invite volunteers to share worship songs or hymns that come to mind that reflect Psalm 125. (Suggestion: "We Will Not Be Shaken" by Brian Johnson.)

Invite someone to read **Psalm 126**. Ask: **What was the reason for the pilgrims' joy? For their hope? How does this Psalm give you hope for your spiritual journey?** Encourage learners to record their response on One Hopeful Step at a Time (PSG, p. 91). Ask adults what song this Psalm brings to mind. (Suggestion: The old gospel hymn "Bringing in the Sheaves.")

Request learners to imagine pilgrims sitting around campfires and bragging, "We got here first. We came the furthest. Our people sure build good cities and temples." Request learners consult Psalm 127:1-2 and state how singing this Psalm could help put things into proper perspective. Use the PSG (p. 93) to emphasize the two aspects of hope referenced in Psalm 127 and to explain how Psalm 128 expands the perspective of blessing and hope that is contingent on Psalm 128:1. Encourage learners to complete One Hopeful Step at a Time (PSG, p. 91) for Psalms 127 and 128. Read the paragraph from the Expository Notes beginning with: The hope for God's blessings as sung by the pilgrims... (LG, p. 71). Declare: When we sing "Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God" we reflect that hopeful truth.

State we would like to think if we always do the right thing that You will be happy, and it will go well for you as stated in

Psalm 128:2, but Psalm 129 conveys the pilgrims' reality. **Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 129:1-4.** Use the PSG (p. 89) and Expository Notes (LG, p. 72) to relay the historical context of this Psalm. Ask: **What is our hope when it feels like this world has plowed long furrows in our backs?** Encourage learners to write responses on One Hopeful Step at a Time (PSG, p. 91) for Psalm 129. **Read John 16:33.** Declare we remind ourselves of that hope when we sing "It is Well With My Soul," #447.

4. Say: **We are two-thirds of the way through the Psalms of Ascent. If the pilgrims sang these songs sequentially on their journey, they've gotten increasingly closer to the presence of God manifested in the temple. Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 130.** Determine what the pilgrims have become increasingly aware of and why. Emphasize from the PSG (p. 90): Psalm 130 highlights the fact that worship ... should always be a time of repentance. Coming into God's presence makes us mindful of our unworthiness. **Ask what gave the pilgrims hope.** Encourage learners to complete One Hopeful Step at a Time (PSG, p. 91) for Psalm 130. Invite volunteers to identify songs we sing today that correspond with Psalm 130. (Suggestions: "Grace Greater Than Our Sin" #105, "His Mercy is More" by Keith Getty.)

Request a volunteer read Psalm 131. Analyze why the psalmist would use a weaned child to illustrate his relationship with God. Ask: How can a childlike spirit give us a sense of hope on our spiritual pilgrimage? Instruct learners to record their response on One Hopeful Step at a Time (PSG, p. 91). Consider songs believers sing today that reflect the quiet trust of Psalm 131. (Suggestions: "Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus," #501, or "Be Still My Soul," #514.)

Summarize Psalm 132, using remarks from the PSG (p. 93) and Expository Notes (LG, p. 73). Explain singing this Psalm gave pilgrims hope that God keeps His promises. Encourage learners to write that on One Hopeful Step at a Time (PSG, p. 91) for Psalm 132. Invite volunteers to identify songs that encourage them that God keeps His promises. (Suggestions: "Standing on the Promises," #339, or "Amen" sung by Steven Curtis Chapman.)

Invite a volunteer to read Psalm 133. Consider why this might have been a relevant song to sing at this point in the pilgrimage. Point out journeys can strain relationships. Consider what hope and responsibility is conveyed in this Psalm. Encourage learners to write responses on One Hopeful Step at a Time (PSG, p. 91). We convey the message of Psalm 133 when we sing hymns like "Make Me a Blessing," #380 or "Bind Us Together," #390.

The Psalms of Ascent end with an evening call to worship. **Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 134.** Explain the intimate connection between the people and God that occurs as they bless God, and He blesses them. Ask: **How can we bless God?** Invite volunteers to identify songs that bless the Lord. (Suggestions: "10,000 Reasons (Bless the Lord)" by Matt Redman, or "Bless His Holy Name," #151.) Analyze the hope offered in this Psalm, encouraging learners to once more write responses on One Hopeful Step at a Time (PSG, p. 91).

Declare: **Hope is essential for our pilgrimage. We have a sure and certain hope in Jesus, so let's keep pressing onward and upward in our journey toward Christlikeness.** Close by singing together the hymn "Higher Ground," (#532).

EXPOSITORY NOTES





YOUR NOTES

INTRODUCTION TO THE PSALMS

While the Book of Psalms is the most popular book in the Old Testament among believers, it is also little known and a difficult book to understand for many. Even still, the Psalms have provided the most important model for personal prayer throughout Christian history. People prayed by reading and praying through the Psalms when life's situations made praying difficult or even impossible.

So, what are the Psalms? The Psalms are a compilation of songs and prayers that are unlike any other parts of the Bible. They are divinely inspired and humanly uttered confessions, prayers, and praises addressed and raised to God. The Psalms trace humanity's interaction with God from various places and seasons in faith life.

Within these interactions, we discover God's character. The writer speaks of God as a Shepherd, King, Redeemer, Creator, One who is just, holy, and more. These songs give us deeper insight into God and how we are to relate to Him and His creation. We find that He loves us and offers us the opportunity to be His people. That being so comes with the expectation of living in light of that relationship.

PRAISE BOOK FULL OF LAMENTS

Commonly known as the Prayer Book of Israel, the title of the book in Hebrew is Tehillim, literally meaning "praises" or "collection of praises." For a book with such a title, the Book of Psalms actually contains many more lament psalms than praise psalms. In fact, the earlier parts of the book are filled with lament psalms, while the praise psalms are concentrated more in the latter part of the Psalms (for example, 113-118; 146-150). It is possible that the placement of these psalms encouraged the Israelites to engage in honest lamenting and crying to their Lord, before they learn to praise the Lord whole-heartedly.

Another frequently used title "Psalter" comes from "Psalterion." Psalterion is the name of a stringed instrument. This title comes from a fifth century A.D. copy of the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint.

ORGANIZATION

The 150 Psalms in the psalter are divided into five books (Psalms 1-41; 42-72; 73-89; 90-106; 107-150). According to Jewish tradition, this division is patterned after the five-part division of the Pentateuch. A doxology is found at the end of each book with Psalm 150 providing a concluding for the entire psalter.

Scattered throughout the psalter are various collections, including the following: **the Davidic Collections** (3-41; 51-72; 138-145), **the Korahite Collections** (42-49; 84-85; 87-88), **the Asaphite Collections** (73-83), **the Hallelujah Psalms** (111-118; 146-150), and **the Songs of Ascents** (120-134).

TITLES

All but 34 of the 150 Psalms have titles in the Hebrew text. The titles are a part of the canonical text of the Hebrew Bible and contain various types of information and range from one word to a lengthy comment. Often there is a stated author (David-73 times, Asaph-12 times, The Sons of Korah-11 times, Solomon-twice, 72, 127, Moses-once, 90, etc.) while other times this information is absent. Others include historical information (examples include Psalm 18, which includes notes about David's circumstances at the time of writing), musical information (Psalm 4, "For the choir director: with stringed instruments"), liturgical information (Psalm 38, "A psalm of David to bring remembrance"); or information about the type of Psalm (*Maskil* in Psalms 32, 42, 44 or *Shir*, over 30). Additionally, the notation *selah* appears 71 times in 39 different Psalms and may indicate either raising of the voices or a musical interlude or even a pause

POETIC FORM

The Psalms are written in poetry that captures the people's emotions, who are so eager to convey both a sense of desperation and jubilation. The literary features of the Psalms include passionate and concrete expressions that utilize many powerful and vivid images. Repetition is another common feature when certain contrast or emphasis is intended. Keywords are often repeated to highlight important themes and concepts. Emphasis and further explanation on important points are expressed through another Hebrew literary device known as "parallelism." In parallelism, the first line of thought expressed is repeated in the second line through a similar thought (synonymous parallelism-Ps. 19:1), or the second line contradicts the first (antithetic parallelism-Ps. 1:6), or the second line completes the thought expressed in the first line (synthetic parallelism-Ps. 52:4).

Images or word pictures in psalms are also expressed through various means. A **simile** compares different objects and subjects with the use of "like," or "as" (Ps. 124:4), while a metaphor compares them without the use of "like," or "as" (Ps. 23:1). The exchange of one noun for another with which it is commonly associated is known as **metonymy** (Ps. 5:9b). **Hyperbole** says more than what is literally intended (Ps. 118:10). All of these literary devices must be recognized carefully and interpreted accurately in order to understand what the psalmists are expressing.

YOUR NOTES

PSALM TYPES

Some of the more significant psalm types that earlier generations of scholars have identified based on the content include the following: **Community Laments** (prayers for help in crisis situations raised by the members of community: Pss. 44, 58); **Individual Laments** (prayers for help in times of need: Pss. 3, 6); **Thanksgiving psalms** (prayers of thanks for help actualized: Pss. 30, 67); **Psalms of Trust** (expression of trust and confidence in the Lord: Pss. 23, 27); **Hymns** (adoration and praise offered to the Creator God: Pss. 8, 19); **Wisdom psalms** (wise saying offered for daily living: Pss. 1; 127); **Royal psalms** (Israel's kings as spiritual leaders: Pss. 2, 20). Other less common types include, **Creation psalms** (Pss. 104, 145); **Torah psalms** (Pss. 1, 119); and the **Penitential psalms** (Pss. 32, 51).

WHY THE PSALMS?

Psalms capture the full spectrum of human experience lived out in daily life in relation to God the Creator. Within the scope of Israel's special "covenant relationship" with God, there are certain facts that the psalmists appear to be taking for granted. God is their Lord and they are His people. He is on their side and He can be trusted at all times. This special dynamic is accurately captured in the following verse: "Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts before Him. God is our refuge" (Ps. 62:8). Throughout the entire 150 Psalms the psalmists teach us why this Lord can be trusted, how to pour out our hearts before Him, and how to find refuge and rest in the Lord. Through the prayers and praises offered to God, the psalmists reveal the character of God that makes this special relationship possible.

As the "Prayer Book of the Bible" (per Dietrich Bonhoeffer), the Psalms offer a refreshing new possibility in approaching God: Honestly, just as we are, without pretention. We will become the most our Lord has created us to be by fully embracing the nature and character of God as we pray through the Psalms.

THE FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

The character of God as revealed in selected Psalms is the focus of this study. As people get a glimpse of God's character and how to relate to and embrace it, we begin to understand our need for forgiveness and what it means to live as God's people. Consequentially, we will be challenged to live as God's people, demonstrating His character in a fallen world.

Hymnals are sometimes organized by themes, authors, or usage. In the Book of Psalms, we find some of Psalms organized and grouped in the same manner. This study will look at Psalms that are grouped together either by position in the book or come from the same experience. Sermons will be developed from other Psalms not included in the study that support the themes of each session. A plan for reading the Book of Psalms in the seven-week period will also be provided.

YOUR NOTES



YOUR NOTES

GOD REVEALS HIS CHARACTER THROUGH HIS SON

A little over half way through Book I of the psalter there is a group of three Psalms familiar to many Christians. “Why have you forsaken me?” “The Shepherd Psalm,” and “The King of Glory” are but well-known and representative phrases from each of these psalms. What is a lesser known, but perhaps just as important for members of the faith community today, is that these psalms reveal the character of God when read and understood through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

FROM SUFFERING TO PRAISE (PS. 22)

Uttered first in the mouth of the suffering David, the words of Psalm 22 were picked up by numerous sufferers throughout generations. While this psalm teaches us how to cry out to God honestly and faithfully in our suffering, what Jesus did at Calvary revealed the character of God to the members of the faith community.

THE PRAYERS OF THE SUFFERER (VV. 1-21)

1-2. Notice how remarkable these verses are: First, in his urgent prayer for rescue, the psalmist kept calling God, “My God.” Verse 1 starts with “My God, my God,” and it is repeated in verse 2. Second, the psalmist says that “My God” has been negligent as “My God.” Instead of rushing to his rescue, the psalmist boldly asserts that “You abandoned me... are you so far away from my deliverance and my words of groaning ... you do not answer.” The repeated presence of the pronouns “My” and “you” points to the intimate relationship the psalmist relied on in his time of need.

3-5. This section has a more **reverential** tone: “But you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.” The psalmist believes that the reason for Israel’s praise is because, “Our ancestors trusted in you; they trusted, and you rescued them.” Israel’s ancestors trusted in their God and God rescued them and “[they] were not disgraced.” Unfortunately, the same thing cannot be said for the psalmist, and that added to his problem.

6-8. As if being in a state of God-forsakenness was not enough, the psalmist’s problem with God also affected his human relationships. He was, “**scorned...despised by people... everyone ... mocks me.**” The way the people treated him makes the psalmist conclude that he was like “a worm and not a man”; an object of extreme insignificance and unpleasantness (see Ex. 16:20 and Isa. 14:11). People’s taunting words cut him deeply: “He relies (literally, “roll” his burden on God in an act of commitment and trust) on the LORD; let him save him; let the LORD rescue him, since he takes pleasure in him.” Relying on God did not work out well for the psalmist.

9-10. The psalmist now reminds God that he depended on Him from a young age: “You who brought me out of the womb, making me secure at my mother’s breast. I was given over to you at birth.” Sadly, his current situation failed to reflect that intimacy.

11-18. The psalmist’s only **petition** to God so far is expressed in verse 11: **“Don’t be far from me, because distress is near and there’s no one to help.”** The reason why is because of his powerful and numerous enemies, “bulls,” (12. Bashan, with its fertile pastures was known for the production of bulls and cows in Old Testament times. See Amos 4:1) and “lions,” (13), they “surround,” and “encircle” (13) him. He is facing an imminent and overwhelming threat. Furthermore, being surrounded by his enemies takes a toll on him. His body is being “poured out like water” flowing away with his “bones [being] disjointed” and his heart, “like wax, melting within [him]” because of fear. As a result, his strength is dried up completely (“like baked clay” or the mouth that is so dry that the tongue sticks to the roof of the mouth). He blames God for his current agony: “You put me into the dust of death” (15).

The psalmist’s complaint **intensifies** in verses 16-19, with an account of what happens to the dead. The piercing of hands and feet in verse 16 describes an act of violence done to the dying. The expression “I can count all my bones” in verse 17 describes how the violent attack would result in many broken bones. To further his misery, he says “people look and stare” instead of helping him. They cast lots and divided his garments as if he was already dead.

19-21. His **second petition** is for God, Whom he addresses as “My strength,” to “come quickly to help [him]” before it is too late. Finally, he cries out to God to “save me from the lion’s mouth!” In his dire need and perishing hope, the psalmist speaks forcefully to God: “Don’t be far away ... come quickly to help me. Rescue my life ... save me!” Then comes an abrupt change in the psalm: “You answered me!” No longer speaking in distress and complaint, the psalmist gives firm and sound affirmation for **what his Lord has done**. While there is no explanation or elaboration in the text, it is obvious that God finally answered him and delivered him from his enemies!

PRAISE FOR THE SOVEREIGN DELIVERER (VV. 22-31)

22-24. After experiencing the divine rescue, the psalmist shifts his focus to what God has done: “I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters; I will praise you in the congregation.” “Your name” refers to God’s very nature and character, not just the name of the Lord. His name is His reputation—the One who comes through and saves. He then speaks to the other “you,” “who fear the LORD,” “descendants of Jacob,” and “descendants of Israel,” telling not just one or some but “all” of them to “praise him, honor him, and revere him.” The reason is, **“For he has not despised or abhorred the torment of the oppressed. He did not hide his face from him but listened when he cried to him for help.”**

25-26. “The great assembly” in verse 25 may be even larger than the assembly in verse 22 was. The psalmist now says that he will express his praise and thanksgiving to his Lord with payment of his vow in front of all who fear the Lord. The payment made when fulfilling a vow was often used to provide a festive meal to which the “humble” and needy were often invited (see Deut. 14:28-29). The psalmist declares that those invited “will eat and be satisfied; those (out of desperate need) who seek the LORD will praise Him.” His salvation experience prompts the psalmist to offer an invocation for these people: “May your hearts live forever!”

27-28. The psalmist now addresses even bigger circles of the people of the Lord: “All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD. All the families of the nations will bow down before you” because the Sovereign Lord “**rules over the nations.**” He calls for all inhabitants of the earth to join him giving praise and thanks to the Ruler of “the nations.”

29-31. While “all who prosper (literally, “fat”) on earth” are commanded to “eat and bow down,” the psalmist now envisions “all those who go down to the dust will kneel before him” and “even the one who cannot preserve his life,” praising the Lord! In this extraordinary **moment of joy**, the psalmist sees no reason to limit those who may praise the God of his salvation to those who are alive.

Next, the psalmist boldly anticipates that the coming generations “will serve Him” and “will be told about the Lord” and then “They will come and declare his righteousness; to a people yet to be born they will declare what he has done.” He is so confident in his saving God that he is sure even the coming generation will experience His saving grace in their own lives and will tell others about “what he has done.”

Psalm 22 is a **gut-wrenching cry of the sufferer who experiences abandonment and isolation from both God and fellow human beings** before eventually being delivered by God. The contributions of this Psalm to the greater faith community are many; among them the candor and persistence with which the petitioner approached God and how he called everyone from near to far to praise the Lord following his deliverance.

However, this Psalm takes on a greater significance for Christians through the ages when Jesus Christ, on the cross, identified with the suffering psalmist and all others who cried the same words to the Lord out of agony. The same forsakenness (v. 1), the betrayal, mockery, and attack (vv. 7-8; 12-17), along with injustice (18) experienced by the psalmist happened to Jesus as well (see Mark 15:34 and John 19:23-24). Even so, just as God **delivered** the psalmist from his suffering, God **raised** Jesus from the dead.

In so doing, God replaced human anguish with hope, betrayal with trust, and injustice with His righteousness. In the end, what was forsaken and condemned by God was that very sense of God-forsakenness that the psalmist and Jesus, along with numerous believers, cried out to God about. Here is a New Testament writer’s account of what is now possible for God’s people: “Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

THE GOOD SHEPHERD (PS. 23)

Psalm 23 is one of the best known and most beloved of all the Psalms and passages in the Bible. People in need of peace, tranquility, and comfort have turned to this Psalm to address their needs through the ages. At the same time, this Psalm addresses the presence of threat and darkness that exists in human life and the very present remedy for it.

THE SHEPHERD AND SHEEP (VV. 1-3)

This “Davidic Psalm” begins with a bold confession: “The LORD is my shepherd; I have what I need.” The psalmist, a sheep in His flock, lacks nothing because “the LORD is my shepherd.”

To be human is to desire, and to desire more of things, possessions, and pleasure. Most of the world determines their degree of happiness in life by how many desired things one owns. Outrageously, that is not the case here. With the Lord as “my shepherd” the sheep really lacks nothing!

The explanation for not lacking anything is given next. First, the shepherd “lets [the sheep] **lie down in green pastures**.” When the Lord is “my shepherd,” the sheep can **trust** His ability to find the best place for grazing. That is where the sheep lies down after having eaten plenty! All that the sheep needs to do is trust the shepherd and get his appetite ready!

Second, “[My shepherd] leads me **beside quiet waters**.” Sheep are prone to be swept away in swift, hasty streams, so it is important for the shepherd to guide them to the best and safe watering holes where the sheep can quench their thirst safely. With the shepherd skillfully guiding the sheep to these quiet areas of the stream, where there is plenty of water for all of the animals, the sheep only has to follow the shepherd.

The final explanation for the shepherd’s care is in the way “He leads [the sheep] **along the right paths for his name’s sake**.” Another skill of a good shepherd is to guide the flock through “right paths” when they are moving. They avoid going through rough, stony, and narrow paths or through dark places where threat and danger may lurk. “For his name’s sake” at the end of verse 3 sums up the “nature” and “reputation” of the shepherd, who does all this because that is who He is!

The description of the good shepherd in these verses shows that the bold declaration “there is nothing I lack” in verse 1 was not an exaggeration. Because the psalmist repeatedly uses the first person pronoun in these opening verses—“I, me, my”—while addressing the shepherd in the third person, it is possible to picture that the psalmist is sharing his “personal” faith confession with others around him: “This is who my Lord really is!”

THE JOURNEY THROUGH THE DARKEST VALLEY (VV. 4-5)

A new image of a journey through a dangerous place begins in verse 4. The life of the sheep under the care of the good shepherd is not without threats and danger as the phrase, “Even when I go through the darkest valley” indicates. **Life includes both good and difficult times**, and it is not “if,” but “when” one goes through the deep valley of deathly shadow. The psalmist confesses, “I fear no danger,” because “you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.” It is one thing to go through the dark places all alone; it is totally different with the presence of the Lord and the rod and staff that protect and guide. The fear is replaced with comfort.

Interestingly, through verse 3 the Lord has been addressed in the third person, now addressed in the second person “you” in verses 4 and 5. At the moment when the traveler is most in need of His help and protection, knowing and addressing God as “you” is preferred over addressing Him as “he.” “You are with me” gives a greater degree of comfort and intimacy than “He is with me.” The placement of “You are with me” at the center of the Psalm may not be coincidental; rather, “[Lord,] **You are with me**” seems to be a central confession of the psalmist with his opening confession, “the LORD is my shepherd.” Throughout the Bible, God’s people’s experience of “fear” was countered by the assuring words of God, “I

am with you” (see for example, Gen. 6:24; Jer. 1:8; Acts 18:9-10).

Even when food is scarce, further complicated by the presence of enemies, “You prepare a table before me.” The picture of God’s generous care is expressed: “You [generously] anoint my head with [precious] oil; my cup overflows.” What the psalmist confessed in verse 1, “[Because] The LORD is my shepherd, I have what I need,” is an absolute reality in verse 5.

THE PURSUIT OF GOODNESS AND FAITHFUL LOVE (V. 6)

The final verse includes two declarations made by the psalmist. First, “Only goodness and faithful love (also known as “covenant love, unfailing love”, in English) will pursue me all the days of my life.” In the original language of the Old Testament, the verb translated in the CSB as “pursue” is an intensely active and powerful verb. The object of pursuit makes it even more amazing. Instead of being pursued by enemies, dangers, and threats in life, the psalmist is confident that **God’s best—goodness acted out according to his covenant commitment**—will pursue and chase after him until it captures and lands on him.

The second declaration is “I will dwell in the house of the LORD as long as I live.” *House* here may symbolically mean God’s dwelling place. In light of his earlier affirmation, “You are with me” in verse 4, he is affirming that “I will be with you all of my life!” And, why not?! It is the life lived in the presence of God, which he earlier declared, lacks nothing. He gave several examples of God’s active and generous love. Now he declares to the world his own commitment to live in the presence of the Lord forever.

While the caring nature of the shepherd expressed in Psalm 23 more than adequately portrays the character of God, the **Good Shepherd illustration** Jesus told in John 10 further highlights the divine character. Notice the intimate nature of the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep. The shepherd calls “his own sheep by name” (John 10:3). The shepherd not only owns the sheep, but also knows each of them by name. The shepherd intimately knows his own sheep just like “Father knows [Jesus]” (John 10:14-15).

The shepherd “leads them out...[and] the sheep follow him because they know his voice” (John 10:3, 4; Ps. 23:2-4). He leads the sheep and when problems rise, he rushes to protect them (see Ps. 23:4). While thieves and robbers only want “to steal and kill and destroy,” the Good Shepherd is “the gate” (10:7) which the sheep enter “to find pasture” (John 10:9; Ps. 23:2). In fact, unlike the thieves and robbers, the true and authentic (therefore, “good”) shepherd “has come so that they may have life and have it in abundance” (John 10:10).

While “the hired hand, since he is not the shepherd and doesn’t own the sheep, leaves them and runs away” when danger approaches (John 10:12), the Good Shepherd is recognized by his willingness to “[lay] down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). Just as the psalmist declared that “All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD...[and] bow down before [the Lord]” (Ps. 22:27), the Good Shepherd “must bring [the other sheep] that are not from this sheep pen [so that] they will listen to [His] voice (John 10:16). The sacrifice that the Good Shepherd is willing to make is because of the obedient love he has for the “Father [who] loves [him]” (John 10:17-18).

THE KING OF GLORY (PS. 24)

Believed to be sung in the context of Israel's worship, the third and final Psalm in this group appears at first to be disjointed with three distinctively different parts: The hymn to the LORD of creation (vv. 1-2), qualifications for worshipers (vv. 3-6), and the hymn to the King of glory (vv. 7-10). However, as each section is carefully read and understood, the movement from one to the next becomes clear along with the overall connection.

THE HYMN TO THE LORD OF CREATION (VV. 1-2)

This opening hymn begins with the bold and unmistakable assertion: "The earth and everything in it, the world and its inhabitants, belong to the LORD." According to Hebrew syntactical order, "to the Lord" is stated first followed by "the earth...the world," making clear the intended emphasis. The Creator Lord owns everything and possesses everyone in His creation. Clearly implied here is that nothing in the world can exist to serve anything or anyone other than the Lord.

Verse 2 provides the reason why He is the sole owner of creation: "For he laid its foundation on the seas and established it on the rivers." Only the Lord had the power to create a secure and dry place in the middle of watery chaos (see Gen. 1:1-13); therefore, making it hospitable to life. To affirm the **divine ownership of creation** is to recognize and embrace His sovereign reign over the world.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR WORSHIPERS (VV. 3-6)

These verses raise questions about the qualification for worshipers, possibly to those who are preparing to enter the temple area: "Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?" Climbing the mountain of the Sovereign Lord and standing in God's holy place was an act of privilege and blessing that only qualified ones were allowed to do.

The qualification is stated in verse 4: "The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not appealed to what is false, and who has not sworn deceitfully." Compared to the Levitical sacrifices that addressed the ritual purity of worshipers ("how can sinful human beings approach a holy God?"), here it is ethical purity that the worshipers must meet. While clean hands and pure hearts generally represent the worshipers' actions and attitudes, avoiding what is false and swearing deceitfully point specifically to the way one behaves toward other human beings. Therefore, the condition for entry to worship is **evidence of life lived under the rule of the Sovereign Lord**.

The promise for the one who meets the entry qualification is "He will receive blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation." People whose lives are lived according to the will of the Sovereign Lord are not only allowed to enter into the worship of the Lord, they will receive two things from the Lord, who is present in worship. One is the blessing of God (the gift to grow and thrive in the world that only God can impart)¹ and the second is the gift of right relationship (between God and human) from the God of their salvation.

Verse 6 sums up the characterization of the worshipers: “Such is the generation of those who inquire of him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.” Generation here refers to people with certain ethical qualities as listed in verse 4. These are the ones who, marked by their moral integrity, come to seek the face of the God of Jacob (that God that Israel’s ancestor Jacob worshiped) in worship.

THE HYMN TO THE KING OF GLORY (VV. 7-10)

This final section begins with antiphonal voices, starting with the demand coming from the procession of worshipers: “Lift up your heads, you gates! Rise up, ancient doors! Then the King of glory will come in.” The description “**King of glory**” refers to a victorious, triumphant God. It is only fitting that the gates and doors in Jerusalem and its temple open wide and tall to accommodate the honor and splendor ascribed to this King.

Another voice then raises a question: “Who is this King of glory?” The answer follows: “The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle.” The opening hymn was to the Lord of creation. Here that Lord is recognized as a “strong and mighty” warrior King. The same antiphonal voices are heard in verses 9-10, with one change. The Lord “strong and mighty...mighty in battle” is replaced with “the LORD of Hosts.” Also translated as “the LORD of the Armies” it literally means “the LORD most powerful who is equal to none in power.”

When His **kingship** is properly recognized, the next move can only be the worship of the King of glory, for there is no other object of worship apart from Him. Worshiping the Lord is only possible when one recognizes His kingship and comes under His rule. No authentic worship can ever take place without submitting to and embracing the kingship of the Lord.

The God whom Israel worships in Psalm 24 is the Lord of creation to whom belongs everything He created (vv. 1-2). This same Lord also delivered His people out of bondage in Egypt and set them free. Therefore, it is only fitting that those who worship the Lord should also recognize the kingship of their God. However, in the greater scheme of things, the picture of God further expands with the coming King of glory, Jesus Christ. This new King of glory also had power and authority given to Him by the Father. However, rather than claiming and using that power to defeat His enemies, he “**humbled himself** by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross. For this reason, God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:8-11).

1. Brueggemann, Walter and William H. Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms in New Cambridge Bible Commentary*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.