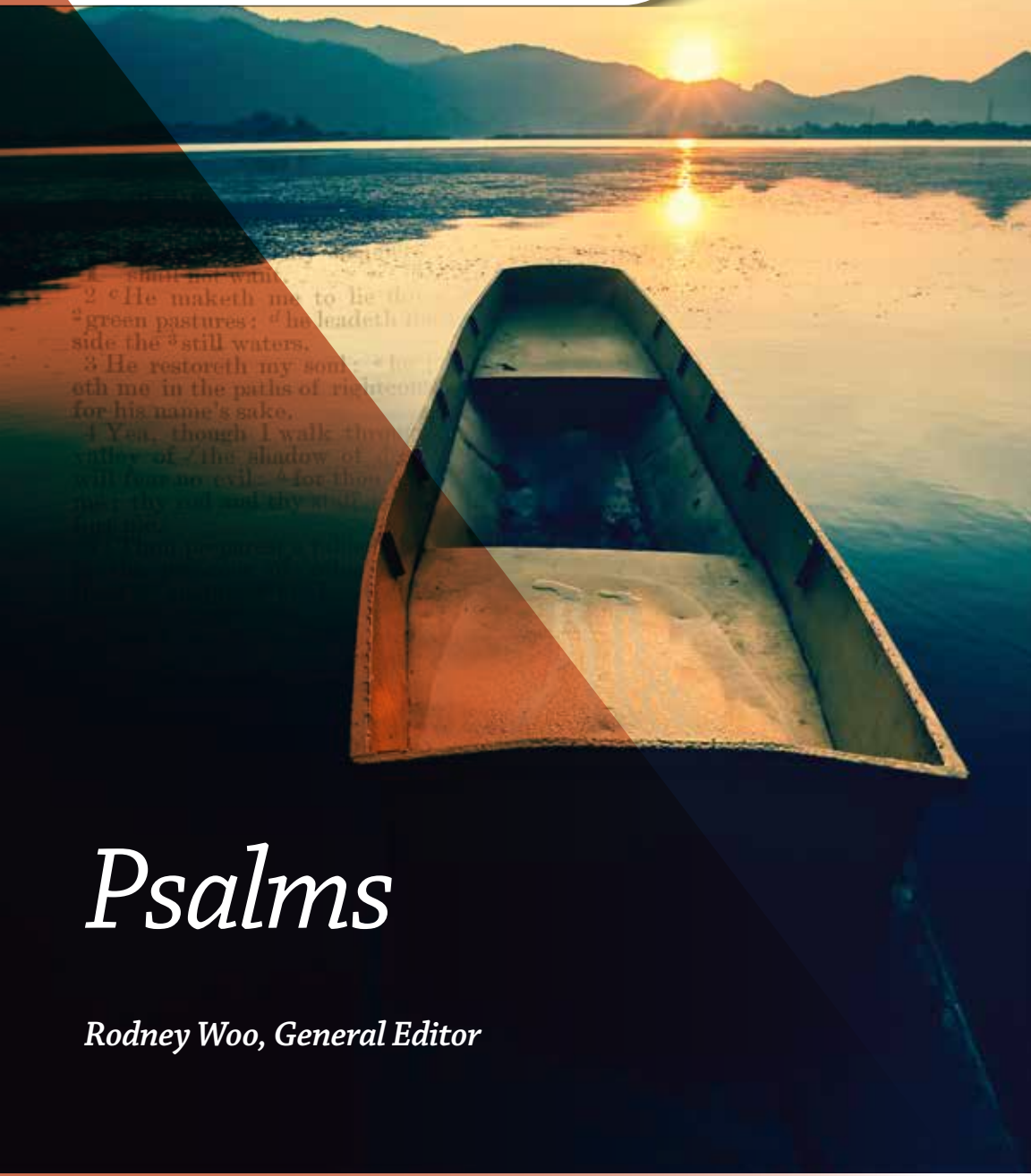




Explore the Bible®

DEAF PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE



2 ^cHe maketh me to lie down
in green pastures: ^dhe leadeth me
side the ^estill waters.
3 He restoreth my soul: ^fhe leadeth
me in the paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.
4 Yea, though I walk through the
valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: ^gfor thou art
with me: thy rod and thy staff
comfort me.

Psalms

Rodney Woo, General Editor

LIFE BY DESIGN

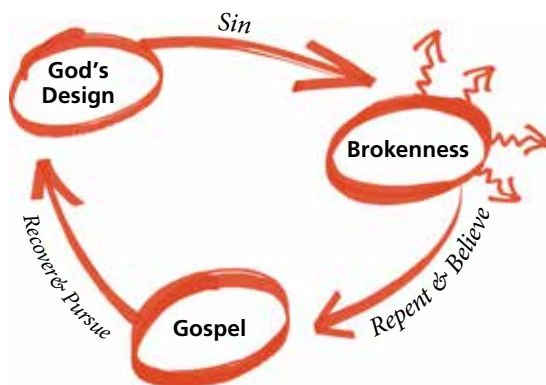
We live in a broken world. This brokenness is seen in suffering, violence, poverty, pain, and death around us. Brokenness leads us to search for a way to make **LIFE work.**

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. (See Genesis 1:31 and Psalm 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. (See Romans 3:23 and Romans 6:23.)

At this point 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. (See John 3:16; Colossians 2:14; and 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.)

We don't have the power to 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. (See Mark 1:15; Ephesians 2:8-9; and Romans 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. (See Philippians 2:13 and Ephesians 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.

Excerpted from Life on Mission: A Simple Way to Share the Gospel.

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Aug. 27



MEET THE WRITER

The writer for this quarter serves as a missionary in places that require him or her to remain anonymous. Please pray for him or her and others who take the gospel to challenging places.

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BIBLE READING PLAN

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3. Psalms 3–4
4. Psalm 5
5. Psalms 6–7
6. Psalms 8–9
7. Psalms 10–11
8. Psalms 12–14
9. Psalms 15–17
10. Psalm 18
11. Psalms 19–21
12. Psalm 22
13. Psalms 23–24
14. Psalms 25–26
15. Psalms 27–28
16. Psalms 29–30
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18. Psalms 32–33
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21. Psalm 37
22. Psalms 38–39
23. Psalms 40–41
24. Psalms 42–43
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28. Psalms 48–49
29. Psalm 50
30. Psalm 51

MONTH 2

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25. Psalms 142–143
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27. Psalm 145
28. Psalm 146
29. Psalm 147
30. Psalm 148
31. Psalms 149–150



ACCEPTING CHRIST



Doyle Snead

Jeremiah 1:5 “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, before you were born I set you apart” (NIV). As I grew up, this verse always touched me. I knew God wanted to be a part of my life, even before I knew I was a sinner and needed Jesus. I am the oldest of four boys and a girl. My parents still talk about how they took us to church before we were even born. My parents rarely talked about their beliefs at home, but they showed what they believed every

day in their behavior, choices, service to others, faithfulness to the church, love for God’s Word, and love for each other and their children. I learned about missions from my parents. My parents joined a group to start a new church (a church plant) and helped it grow and become a large, active church. They taught Sunday school classes, RA’s, GA’s, and Vacation Bible School in the summer. My dad was ordained as a deacon.

Growing up in church, I saw God’s Word demonstrated every day through my parents’ and other adults’ actions. However, I have always been shy. Even today, talking with people is frightening for me. But church was and is the most comfortable place for me to be. I just knew God had a plan for me.

One summer during Vacation Bible School, I noticed all my friends were going forward and accepting Jesus. I did not want to be left behind, so I went forward. In my mind I knew what it meant to say, “I accept Jesus as my Savior,” and I understood the importance of being baptized. But I was missing the real heart connection with God. It was during the next few years I felt God giving me courage to stand up in front of people, to teach a lesson, to lead music, to be an RA camp counselor, to share my testimony, to preach a sermon, and even become licensed to preach. My church youth group went on mission trips to other churches nearby or to other states. We sang, witnessed in public parks, and painted church buildings. With great fear, I preached sermons on these trips. My home church wanted to start a bus ministry, driving a bus in neighborhoods and picking up people to bring them to Sunday morning church. The pastor asked me to go door-to-door, inviting people to ride on the bus to come to church. I met the driver and rode along to greet everyone.

When I was 18, serving as a counselor at an RA camp, I had an amazing personal experience with God. Suddenly, I looked around and everything became so clear. I could see God’s message in all the words of the sermons, songs, and the Bible. Staring into the campfire, all the Scriptures I had read and memorized became clear as God spoke to me. I saw that being called a

Christian did not mean doing things or trying to be good. I realized God was calling me to have a personal relationship with Him and to serve Him in the plan He had for my life. That was when my real heart relationship with God began.

Since that night I have been trying to serve Him faithfully. He has provided many opportunities for me to serve Him in hearing and Deaf ministries. I still face fear and shyness when I talk with people, but I just try to do the best I can while trusting God to give me the wisdom and courage to equal the task in whatever He asks.

Maybe you are missing out on the “heart relationship” with God and the special plan He has for your life. You can have that special relationship today. God makes it easy, even if you are frightened. These verses tell you how to have this special “heart relationship” with God:

“Everyone has sinned and fallen short of God’s glorious standard.”
(Romans 3:23)

“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and if you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, you will be saved.”
(Romans 10:9)

“God makes people right with Himself through their faith in Jesus Christ. This is true for all who believe in Christ, because all people are the same.”
(Romans 3:22)

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF PSALMS

»» Who wrote the Book of Psalms?

Unlike most books of the Bible, the Book of Psalms has several authors. Sometimes the introduction at the beginning of each psalm tells us who wrote that one chapter. David wrote more psalms than anyone else (73 out of 150 psalms). Other men who wrote were Solomon, Asaph, the sons of Korah, Moses, Heman, and Ethan the Ezrahite. About 50 psalms have no author listed, and we cannot know who wrote them. All the authors were Hebrew (Jews).

»» When Was the Book of Psalms Written?

Many different men wrote individual psalms. Moses probably wrote the first psalm (Psalm 90). Moses died around 1272 B.C., so we know the oldest psalm dates from no later than 1272 B.C. The last psalm came during the Babylonian exile (586-538 B.C.). About 686 years passed between the first and last psalm!

The individual chapters of the Book of Psalms are not in chronological (time) order. Most Bible teachers believe the chapters are grouped together by subject or type of psalm.

»» Why Was The Book of Psalms Written?

The authors of the various psalms wrote songs and hymns to God. Writing the psalms were ways the authors honored God, communicated with Him, and expressed their deepest feelings. Some authors seemed to write private songs. Some clearly wrote songs for everyone to sing together in the tabernacle or temple as part of worship.

»» Who Received The Book of Psalms?

Hebrew people were the first people to hear or read the psalms. The psalms were written in their own language. The authors of the psalms gave the hymns and songs to the people. Sometimes, the

people who received the psalms were worship leaders and singers. Some writers call the Book of Psalms “the song book of the Hebrews.” The Hebrew people used the Book of Psalms to guide their worship times together in the tabernacle and the temple.

➤➤ **How should we read and understand the Book of Psalms?**

Many books of the Bible tell a story or teach a series of lessons. The Gospels tell the life and work of Jesus. First Samuel shows us the life of Samuel, Saul, and David during the early days of the kingdom. You can find other examples of how each book has a story or lesson to share.

Unlike those books, the Book of Psalms does not have a single story. Each chapter is complete, without being part of a larger narrative. We can read each chapter alone, without knowing what happened in the chapters before or after.

As you read each chapter, you may notice some lines are short and the sentences do not always seem to be complete. Why is the Book of Psalms written so differently than Exodus or 1 Corinthians or any of the other books? The psalms are songs. Their authors were singers and worship leaders. When we read the Book of Psalms, we need to remember these are the words to different poems and songs.

Poems and songs are not always clear. Writers and singers use symbols and strange phrases to teach. The individual songs may have a repeated phrase, like a chorus, or special words for the song leaders. Remember this as you read the songs. The Book of Psalms is part of what Bible teachers call wisdom literature. This means the psalms teach important concepts of holiness, life, morality, God, and man. We should be careful not to interpret the psalms as promises or laws. The authors were leading worship, not teaching a precise lesson to the people. We can learn from the psalms, but the lessons are guidelines for life, not promises and commands.



Session 1

THE PATH

Believers should accept godly wisdom, because obedience to God's Word is the path of true life.

PSALM 1:1-6

FIRST THOUGHTS

We know the followers of God are different from wicked people. The author of Psalm 1 explained important concepts regarding the difference. He demonstrated the difference by focusing on the actions we see in the life of a follower of God.

Psalm 1 is a wisdom psalm. The verses focus on teaching basic values of godly living. While not every situation will fit a wisdom psalm, we should be able to see how to apply the lessons to our lives.

As we read this passage, we need to remember the author's goal—teaching. The wise writer of Psalm 1 does not promise good things for people who follow his advice. Instead, he teaches basic guidelines to help Bible students make wise choices. As you read Psalm 1, look for the general advice from the author. Remember we should not interpret wisdom literature as promises. Wisdom offers guidelines, not guarantees.

We can understand the difference between guidelines and promises when we remember attending school. Deaf teachers tell their students every year,

“Study hard! If you study and work, you can become anything you want!” Is the teacher promising his students a wonderful future? No, he is teaching a wise concept.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Some Bibles have short notes to introduce various psalms. These notes often list the name of the author. We do not know who wrote Psalm 1. The author of this short psalm did not sign his work, and we cannot find any clues in the verses to help us know when or where he wrote this psalm.

For our study, Psalm 1 has three parts. Verses 1-3 examine the actions of a happy person. Verses 4-5 show us wicked people. Verse 6 summarizes God’s view of both good and wicked people.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. The Path of Life (Psalm 1:1-3)

VERSE 1

¹*Happy are those who don’t listen to the wicked, who don’t go where sinners go, who don’t do what evil people do.*

Verse one describes a happy person. Other Bibles translate the Hebrew word into blessed. We often use the word *happy* to describe a **temporary** emotion we have during good times. Also, sometimes we relate blessings to moments or events. In Psalm 1, the author is not referring to emotions or experiences. Instead, the happy (or blessed) person is someone who finds **contentment** in God, not in an emotion or situation.

Verse one gives three examples of behaviors happy people avoid. Each behavior is a little worse than the one before. The author uses specific words and phrases to show how one bad decision can lead to another.

First, happy people do not listen to people who are bad influences. Wicked people cannot give good advice for holy living. A wise, godly person will choose to listen to other wise people. A wise person will ignore the teachings of evil people.

Second, happy people do not go to the same places as wicked people. This probably means godly people should avoid being with ungodly people as they live their lives. We should still be friends with those who do not know God, but we should always be careful when we decide to spend time with those who do not obey the Bible.

Third, happy people do not copy the actions of those who do not know Jesus. We cannot please Christ while living exactly like people who do not know Him. **Consistent** happiness can only come from living with Jesus daily, and obeying Him.

We can easily see how we apply these three warnings in our daily lives. Do you remember how teachers or parents talked to you about your Deaf friends? They would say, “Who had the idea to go there? Who wanted to do those things? You should not listen to boys like that.” They warned us not to listen to wicked people, not to go with them where they went, and not to do the things they did.

We know God loves the wicked people around us. Jesus spent time with sinners, but He ignored their advice. He brought sinners into His life, but Jesus did not join them in their lives. Christ did not copy their actions or behavior. We should be friendly to non-believers, but we must be careful. We need to know how to include them in our lives without seeking their guidance.

VERSES 2-3

²*They love the LORD’s teachings, and they think about those teachings day and night.*

³*They are strong, like a tree planted by a river. The tree produces fruit in season, and its leaves don’t die. Everything they do will succeed.*

When we know God’s expectations for us, we have a choice to obey or disobey. We also have the choice to obey gladly or **reluctantly**. A happy, or blessed, person finds satisfaction in knowing and gladly obeying God’s Word.

Blessed people also think about God’s Word. Other translations of the Bible say “...**meditate** on God’s law.” The writer did not encourage people to practice Eastern meditation like we see today. Godly people enjoy thinking about, discussing, and learning how to apply God’s Word. God created us to be the most satisfied when we spend time with Him and think about the Scriptures.

The author compared godly people with trees planted by the river. Trees near water have all the **nourishment** they need. The water gives life. The tree pulls **nutrients** through the moist soil. The tree produces fruit and fulfills its purpose in life.

Like the tree, happy people stay close to the Word of God. The Bible gives nourishment for their hearts and souls. When blessed people rely on the Scriptures, they have **productive** lives for God, satisfying His plans for them.

Verse three teaches an important point we often overlook. The tree produces fruit “in season.” We cannot buy fresh strawberries in December because the strawberry season comes in April. Each fruit has a season when

it becomes ready. Fruit trees produce fruit at the right time, and only after a period of growth and maturity.

As godly people, we can produce “fruit” in the form of working for God, but that only comes after we grow. We must feed ourselves on His Word, learning and growing in maturity. At the right time, we will be productive for the kingdom of God.

BIBLE SKILL: *Word Comparison*

The Bible often uses words we normally connect to emotion. Joy, happiness, and delight are three terms that seem emotional but are not. Sometimes, the writer was not referring to an emotion. Instead, he meant a constant condition of the soul or the heart.

Look at the verses below to see what the authors meant. Are these emotional words, or do they refer to how God re-creates us when we are saved?

Nehemiah 8:9-10 _____

Deuteronomy 28:47 _____

Philippians 4:4-7 _____

Think about a time in your life when you experienced contentment. During that time of contentment, how obedient were you to God and His Word (circle one): **Disobedient** **Obedient**

Now, think about a time in your life when you experienced dissatisfaction or discontentment. During that time of discontentment, how obedient were you to God and His Word (circle one): **Disobedient**
Obedient

In what areas of life do believers struggle with obeying God?

What are some changes a person can make that will lead to contentment?

2. The Path of Death (Psalm 1:4-5)

VERSES 4-5

⁴*But wicked people are not like that. They are like chaff that the wind blows away.*

⁵*So the wicked will not escape God's punishment. Sinners will not worship with God's people.*

The author turned his attention to wicked people. He compared happy people to evil people. This comparison supports what we have learned: happiness is part of godliness.

Verse four says, "But wicked people are not like that." What did the author mean? Wicked people are not like what? The writer looked back at verse three. Happy people are like well-fed trees that produce wonderful fruit. Wicked people produce nothing. They are like chaff.

What is *chaff*? When people in the ancient world harvested grain and corn, they had to separate the good food parts from the husks, seeds, and pods on the plant. The parts of the plants that were not food were called the chaff. Farmers would use a long rake to toss the harvested food into the air. The grain was heavy and would simply fall to the ground. The chaff was much lighter and would blow away in the wind. Over time, people used the word *chaff* to mean anything worthless.

Wicked people are like chaff. Their wickedness makes their advice worthless. Unlike holy people, the wicked people of the world do not produce quality results (fruit).

What will happen to the wicked people of the world? Just like the farmer tossed aside the chaff and burned it, God will someday punish those who continue in their wicked ways. Verse five confirms God's plan to punish those who never pursue holiness through Him. Their punishment will be eternal separation from God spent in hell.

KEY DOCTRINE: *Last Things*

"God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be **consigned** to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord."

Will everyone go to heaven? In Psalm 1 we can clearly see how some people will not be saved. What other passages in the Bible agree with Psalm 1?

What verses or stories from the Bible can you share with someone who does not believe God will punish people who refuse to accept Jesus?

3. The Conclusion (Psalm 1:6)

VERSE 6.

⁶*This is because the LORD takes care of his people, but the wicked will be destroyed.*

The psalmist concluded the chapter by showing another difference between the happy person and the wicked. The Lord cares for His people, the people He has blessed. As for the wicked who do not obey God's Word, God will destroy them.

┌
We are often uncomfortable with God's destruction of the wicked. We prefer to think of God's love and mercy, not His anger. Why would a loving God punish people He created?

The real issue is justice. God is fair and He loves and blesses us. He also judges the guilty. When we ask questions about God's decisions to punish someone, we are really asking about the justice of God.

Justice **exists** in our lives. Most people enjoy living in a fair society where we agree to punish guilty people. If an interpreter takes advantage of a Deaf client, we want that interpreter punished. If a hearing teacher at school refuses to sign for Deaf students, we want the school to discipline that teacher. Humans like justice. Justice is fair, moral, and right. Our desire for justice comes from God. He is just, and we are made in His image.

God blesses people who want to learn about His commands, but wicked people are not interested in learning about Him. Wicked people completely reject God's teachings. If a person rejects God's instruction, it means the person rejects God. God's punishment for those who reject Him is fair and just.

Jesus mentioned a connection between obedience and love for God in John 14:15. He said, "If you love me, you will obey my commands." Those who choose not to listen to the words of God cannot obey Him. If we do not obey, then we cannot love Him. God does not destroy those who obey and love Him. He only punishes people who reject Him and follow their own path.

During this week, how have you demonstrated the words of John 14:15?

How does God respond to your love and obedience?

How can we celebrate knowing that God takes care of believers?

IN MY CONTEXT

We all want to live **productive** lives. Are you productive for God? The key to being happy and productive is to feed our spirits from the Word of God. While we often experience spiritual feeding at church, we should not rely only on what our pastors or teachers tell us. We are to grow like trees planted near water, not like trees in the desert with only a little bit of rain.

What can you do to “plant” yourself near God’s instructions every day?

What would your life look like if you could find that nourishment?

How would your relationships with other people change if you were like a tree planted near the water?

God will someday judge those who reject Him. We can see in our own lives whether we accept (obey) or reject (disobey) God’s teachings. Do you sometimes reject God’s instructions? YES NO How do you reject them?

What will you to do to fix this?

Do you have friends who are rejecting God’s teachings? YES NO What can you do to help them experience a right relationship with God?

MEMORY VERSE

“This is because the LORD takes care of His people, but the wicked will be destroyed.”

—Psalm 1:6



Session 2

THE PAST

We can learn from the past as we compare God's faithfulness with the unfaithfulness of people.

PSALM 78:5-8,32-39

FIRST THOUGHTS

How many chances do we need to learn important lessons? Sometimes we learn lessons quickly. When children touch a boiling pot of water, they usually learn not to touch it after the first burn. Other lessons take us longer to understand and apply.

In 1988, sprinter Ben Johnson set the world record for the 100-meter race. Race officials later **suspended** Johnson from competing after he failed a drug test. In 2001 and 2007, champion sprinter Justin Gatlin failed drug tests. Officials **banned** him from competition. Also in 2007, athlete Marion Jones gave up all her Olympic medals after she admitted to using **steroids** in competition.

Today athletes can learn from the history of sports. They can see how many athletes paid the price for cheating. Will these athletes learn from history, or will they make the same mistakes as Johnson, Gatlin, and Jones? Sadly, when we look at sports news today, we see many athletes have not learned from the mistakes of athletes in the past.

Asaph, the writer of Psalm 78, wrote to encourage God's people to learn from history. He wanted the Israelites to remember what happened in the past, and teach their families those lessons in the present. His goal was to ensure the spiritual future of God's people.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

King David, an author of many psalms, appointed Heman of the family of Samuel as one of the chief musicians (1 Chronicles 6:33). Heman's main assistant was a man named Asaph (1 Chronicles 6:39). Both Heman and Asaph were from the priestly **tribe** of Levi. Asaph, the assistant to Heman, wrote Psalm 78 as well as several others. Originally, psalms were for singing, so we should not be surprised that a musician wrote some of the psalms.

Many Bible translations introduce Psalm 78 by calling it a *maskil*. This word means "enlightened" or "wise." Asaph spent most of his time in Psalm 78 teaching the Israelites so they could understand and be wise. In verses 1-4, the author explained his goals. The goals were to learn from the past, to apply lessons in the present, and to understand for the future.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Teach for the Future (Psalm 78:5-8)

VERSES 5-7

⁵*The LORD made an agreement with Jacob and gave the teachings to Israel, which He commanded our ancestors to teach to their children.*

⁶*Then their children would know them, even their children not yet born. And they would tell their children.*

⁷*So they would all trust God and would not forget what He had done but would obey His commands.*

Using song, Asaph encouraged the people of God to teach their children about the Lord's wonderful lessons. The people knew the lessons through their understanding of their own national history. Asaph summarized that history.

God first made a covenant with Jacob and later gave His Word to the people of Israel. God commanded the Israelites to share His teachings with their children. This is very important. God did not advise His people to teach their children. God commanded Israel to teach His lessons to future generations.

What was God's goal? Why did He want the Israelite adults to teach His Word to their children? Today, we often try to allow our children to decide

whether or not to believe in God, but God required His people to teach about Him. He required His people to instruct each generation about Him.

God wanted each generation of His people to teach the next generation about Him. He had very specific goals in mind. We can see the goals in verse 7. Asaph said he wanted the people to trust God. God wanted to make sure the people would not forget what He had done. If the people remembered what He had done, they would trust God and obey His commands.

We often learn lessons which we will not use until later in life. For example, in Deaf schools across the country, teachers sign their lessons to Deaf students. They teach advanced math, complicated history, and confusing science. Do Deaf students use those skills in the classroom? Do they take those lessons home and apply them that day? Most of the time they do not. Students learn today what they need to know for success in future years when they continue in school or have jobs.

By following God's commands and Asaph's advice, God's people taught their children and grandchildren about His wonderful acts and holy character. When we teach our children about Him, we prepare them for an obedient future, one filled with trust in God.

VERSE 8

⁸They would not be like their ancestors who were stubborn and disobedient. Their hearts were not loyal to God, and they were not true to Him.

Asaph **contrasted** obedient people with the Israelites' disobedient ancestors. When Moses led the people out of Egypt, they often struggled to remain faithful to God. The first time the people rebelled against God was when Aaron made a golden calf for the people to worship (Exodus 32). The people quickly forgot how God saved them from Egypt, starvation, and thirst.

Asaph was not the only writer who called the disobedient people of God stubborn. Other writers of the Bible had another term to describe stubborn people. They used the term "stiff-necked." This meant unwilling to be flexible and unwilling to allow someone to lead them. In portions of the Bible written before the Psalms, writers used the words *stubborn* and *stiff-necked* at least fourteen times to describe people who refused to follow God's leadership. Other men who wrote after the psalms were written also mentioned stubborn and stiff-necked people who refused to obey the Lord. In the New Testament, Stephen called the Jewish leaders stiff-necked because they resisted the work of the Holy Spirit among the people of God.

Asaph did not want his people to be stubborn. He knew if the people would learn the works and character of God, they would allow God to lead them. The path of holiness leads to happiness. Not knowing God means not obeying Him.

BIBLE SKILL: *Family Matters*

The Bible mentions several families. Some of these families were holy, with parents who trained their children to follow God. Other families made mistakes and sometimes failed to teach their children properly.

Read about these families in the verses below. How did the parents teach or fail to teach God's ways to their children?

1 Samuel 2:11-17,22-25 _____

2 Timothy 1:5-6 _____

Write the names of people who taught you about God and His love?

How did they teach you?

As a believer, what are some opportunities you have in your church or community to teach the next generation about God and His love?

2. Remember the Past (Psalm 78:32-37)

VERSES 32-35

³² *But they kept on sinning; they did not believe even with the miracles.*

³³ *So He ended their days without meaning and their years in terror.*

³⁴ *Anytime He killed them, they would look to Him for help; they would come back to God and follow Him.*

³⁵ *They would remember that God was their Rock, that God Most High had saved them.*

Asaph continued the history lesson in verse 32. He reminded the people in the temple singing these songs of what had already happened. These stories were the histories of the Israelite people. The singers and listeners probably knew exactly what Asaph meant.

The Books of Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Joshua record the many great works of God on behalf of His people. God destroyed the Egyptian army (Exodus 14) in the Red Sea. He sent quail and manna to feed the people (Exodus 16). He conquered the city of Jericho (Joshua 6) and helped the inexperienced Israelite army defeat many kings and nations.

After the death of Moses and Joshua, the older generation of Israelite family leaders died (Judges 2:10). The Bible said a new generation of adults grew up and did not know God or the wonderful things He had done. God's people strayed from holiness and began to worship idols.

Just as Asaph predicted in verse 32, the people did not believe in the miracles God had done. They continued to stray from Him. They forgot His wonderful love. They chose not to obey the Lord.

The rest of the book of Judges shows a **consistent** pattern of teaching, obedience, forgetfulness, and punishment. This happened because the people did not remember God's greatness. At least eight times, the book of Judges reports that the people again forgot their God. They worshiped idols and sinned in evil ways. God punished them through famine, drought, and invading armies.

VERSES 36-37

³⁶ *But their words were false, and their tongues lied to Him.*

³⁷ *Their hearts were not really loyal to God; they did not keep His agreement.*

One of the best-known stories from the book of Judges is about Gideon. Judges 6 records God's punishment of Israel because of their sins. God called Gideon to rescue the nation from the invading Midianite army. In chapter 7, Gideon learned to obey God in faith. He relied on God's guidance. In chapter 8, Gideon set up a golden symbol that caused the people to worship falsely or incorrectly (Judges 8:27). By the end of Gideon's life, the Israelites who fought for Gideon and supported him had already returned to worshiping idols (Judges 8:33-35).

What happened to the people? Did the entire nation learn about God, obey him, and then forget Him in just a few short years? Or did they cry about their sufferings without truly committing to obeying the Lord?

In today's America, Deaf men and women struggle when they say things they do not mean. Deaf men marry and promise to remain faithful, but sometimes they have affairs within just a few years. What do these men say? "I'm sorry—please forgive me. I've learned my lesson; please don't leave me!"

A few years later, it happens again because they really did not mean it.

Everyone does this. We promise never to lie again, but we do it anyway. People spend too much money and end up in debt. No matter how much they cry about having to pay their bills, they do not seem to stop spending money. Athletes cheat by using drugs and want mercy when they are caught, but they do it again and again.

Asaph knew human nature, and he knew the history of the people of Israel. We all stray from God, no matter how much we promise that we've learned our lesson.

KEY DOCTRINE: *Repentance*

Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace.

Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Saviour.

In the book of Acts, Peter called for people to repent of their sins. Some people refuse to turn from their sins. These people are like the Israelites of Asaph's day. They are stubborn. If we want to repent of our sins, we cannot be stubborn about our actions, words, and attitudes. Setting aside our stubbornness is the first step towards repentance.

What lessons can we learn from these verses about insincere repentance?

How can we break the repeating cycle of sinning > experiencing God's discipline > repentance in our life?

What does our relationship with God look like when we truly repent?

3. Compassion in the Present (Psalm 78:38-39)

VERSES 38-39

³⁸ *Still God was merciful. He forgave their sins and did not destroy them. Many times He held back His anger and did not stir up all His anger.*

³⁹ *He remembered that they were only human, like a wind that blows and does not come back.*

Eventually, the Israelite people repented of their sins, and God saved them. Each time the **cycle** ended with the people worshiping the one true God. The cycle always started again as the people sinned against God. Each time they sinned, God forgave them again and again. After the death of Joshua, the people endured the same cycle of worship, sin, punishment, and forgiveness for many years. Over and over, God showed mercy to the people despite their stubbornness. He chose not to destroy them completely.

Asaph compared humanity to the wind. When the wind blows past us, it is gone. It does not turn around and come back to us. Maybe the wind changes direction, but it is different air coming from different places.

Like the wind, humanity comes through life just once. We are not like God, who endures forever and knows all things (Isaiah 40:28). God knows that our short lives keep us from understanding His holiness. We fail to obey Him enough because we often lack understanding and insight. God chose to not completely destroy the Israelites because of His compassion for man's limitations.

What does God see or know beyond the cycle of sin, punishment, and repentance that stops Him from destroying people?

How has God shown mercy to you?

What is your response to His mercy?

IN MY CONTEXT

Throughout history as recorded in the Old Testament, God showed His people how much He loved them. He promised blessings they did not deserve. He showed mercy they did not earn. He guided the people through danger and trouble. God always kept His promises to His people.

How did the people respond? Often, God's people refused to obey Him. They were unfaithful to Him and chose to worship idols. The Israelites sinned with no sorrow, but God remained faithful.

We often act the same way the Israelites acted. God offers us salvation, something we do not deserve. He gives us blessings, forgiveness, and the Holy Spirit to guide us. We frequently choose not to obey Him. God is faithful, but we are not.

What is the answer? We must learn. We need to learn the facts and lessons of the Bible. These lessons will guide us as we live and as we teach those lessons to the next generation.

What have you learned from the history of God's work in your life?

How are you sharing the lessons you have learned with the next generation of Christians?

Spend time this week asking God for direction to opportunities where you can teach the next generation or help someone break the cycle of sin.

MEMORY VERSE

"They would remember that God was their Rock, that God Most High had saved them."

—Psalm 78:35



Session 3

THE SHEPHERD

We can trust God because He is always good.

PSALM 23:1-6

FIRST THOUGHTS

Does God take care of His people? Does He provide for their needs and protect them? Christians often quote various Bible promises that bring comfort by assuring us of God's plans to care for us.

The author of Psalm 23 was King David. David worked as both a shepherd and a king. He experienced God's protection in hard times and in good times. David poured the lessons he learned from his experiences into Psalm 23. As we examine this chapter, we should be able to see how David's experiences with God's protection and provision **mirror** what Christians experience.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Psalm 23 is possibly one of the most familiar psalms in the Bible. David wrote this short psalm, though we do not know when or why. David used **imagery** and symbols from his experience as a shepherd. He described a beautiful picture of God's protection and provision.

Psalm 23 is a song of thanksgiving. Usually the people would speak or sing the psalms together joyfully. They recognized God's grace and provision, especially following difficult times.

Before David became king, he spent years hiding from King Saul. King Saul wanted to kill David. So David lived far from cities and sometimes in caves and wilderness areas. David experienced God's protection and provision. As we read Psalm 23, we will see the different ways God cares for us. However, we must also be careful not to misunderstand this psalm. We should read Psalm 23 and put it together with other verses from the Bible to fully understand the ways God provides for us.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Provides (Psalm 23:1-3)

VERSES 1-2

¹*The LORD is my shepherd; I have everything I need.*

²*He lets me rest in green pastures. He leads me to calm water.*

David used the picture of the relationship between shepherd and sheep to **illustrate** the relationship he had with God. The Lord, as Shepherd, wisely guided David (His sheep). Other psalms refer to the Lord as the shepherd of His people (Psalm 28:9; 80:1). The prophet Isaiah described the Lord's actions as being like a shepherd (Isaiah 40:11). Jesus even called Himself the Good Shepherd who cared for His sheep (John 10:14).

As a young man, David worked as a shepherd for his father (1 Samuel 16:11). Sheep are not the smartest animals, and the shepherd's job was to ensure they had all their needs met. What do sheep need? They need grass and fresh water. They need a safe place to rest. Sheep cannot find these things on their own. They need a shepherd who cares for them and will guide them to grass and water.

Psalm 23 praises the Lord for providing everything His people need. Does this mean everyone in David's time had plenty of food, water, and shelter? Did His people honestly have everything they could ever want or need? While we cannot know for sure, we can assume Israel had both poor and rich people. Some people probably were sick or hungry. David's song is not a promise of wealth and **prosperity**. Remember, psalms communicate eternal concepts, not promises. God does care for His people physically, but His people also suffer illness, poverty, and starvation just as non-believers suffer. David experienced hardship, but he still knew God was present with him during those hard times.

VERSE 3

³ *He gives me new strength. He leads me on paths that are right for the good of His name.*

David moved on from physical needs such as food and water to spiritual **nourishment**. David praised God for giving new strength. Other Bible translations say things like restores my soul, refreshes my soul, and renews my life. From these different points of view, we can more clearly understand David's meaning.

The new strength from God was **primarily** spiritual and emotional strength. David faced danger (lions, 1 Samuel 17:34-37), enemies (Goliath, 1 Samuel 17:42-51), war (1 Samuel 18:5-7), and attempted murder (by Saul, 1 Samuel 19:1-2). He lived in the wilderness. Through all his hard times, David continued serving the Lord. God gave him the spiritual strength to serve.

David also praised God for His guidance in verse three. A shepherd does not magically produce grass and water for his sheep. He guides and leads them to the right places. God guided David along the right paths, showing David where to go and what to do. In 1 Samuel 23, we can read examples of God's guidance for David.

Why did God guide David? Why would He guide us? Some Christians would say God guides us because of His love. Others might guess He leads us so we can be successful. Both reasons are correct, but Psalm 23 lists a new concept. God leads us for His own glory. By guiding us along the proper paths in life, God gets full credit for our success. We praise Him for His guidance as we succeed. We can also find comfort in His purposes when we fail.

BIBLE SKILL: *Compare Bible Translations*

Bible scholars usually work in teams to translate the Bible from the original Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. Each translation team has its own unique understanding of these ancient languages. We can read different translations and gain a better understanding of a chapter by comparing the different phrases. Read Psalm 23 in at least three different translations, and talk about the unique phrases and words.

Translation name: _____

Translation name: _____

Translation name: _____

How has God provided for your spiritual and physical needs?

What was your response to his provision?

If God provides for our needs, why are some Christians poor?

Discuss your answer with your class.

2. Guards (Psalm 23:4)

VERSE 4

⁴Even if I walk through a very dark valley, I will not be afraid, because You are with me. Your rod and Your shepherd's staff comfort me.

Like all people, David endured difficult times. He called those bad experiences a very dark valley. Other translations use stronger words: “valley of the shadow of death” (KJV), or “dark valley of death” (TLB). As we read verse 4 about David’s journey through difficulties, we need to remember verse 3: He gives me new strength. He leads me on paths that are right for the good of His name.

David thanked God for guidance down the correct pathway and immediately noticed that his path sometimes went through some very dark places. God knew there would be hard times when He placed David’s feet on the correct pathway. Those hard experiences did not mean David was walking the wrong direction.

Every year, thousands of Deaf students head off to college. They register for classes and move into dorms. They want a college degree to help them as they make their way in society. However, many Deaf students struggle. They become homesick or fail a few tests. As the problems increase, these Deaf students ask themselves, “Did I make a mistake coming here? Should I quit and go home?” Some do go home, but the rest of the students remember they will have hard times at college. Bad experiences do not mean they made the wrong choice.

Pastors and churches have similar experiences. When a Deaf church calls a new pastor, everyone is excited. The church members say, “This is God’s plan!” A year later, when attendance has dropped and giving is down, people begin to wonder if they heard God correctly. “We’re struggling,” they say. “This cannot be the right path.” Psalm 23 seems to communicate to us

God's pathways often lead us through dark times. We should find comfort in knowing this is His path, and He is with us.

David knew God would always lead him to the right decisions in life. As he struggled, David knew God was with him always. David did not have to be afraid of enemies or problems because God would be with him. Like David, we all know we will face tragedy, sadness, and problems. We do not need to fear those things, though, because God is with us, too.

KEY DOCTRINE: *God's Promises*

God is walking before, beside, and behind us on the right path and especially through the "very dark valley." He is not surprised by the challenges that we experience. Read the following Scripture passages. Write what God promises to His children.

Romans 10:9 _____

Malachi 4:2 _____

Matthew 6:25-33 _____

John 6:40 _____

What difficulties have you or someone you know experienced?

During that difficult time, what helped you or your friend see God's presence?

How did God's presence make you or your friend feel?

3. Hosts (Psalm 23:5-6)

VERSE 5

⁵*You prepare a meal for me in front of my enemies. You pour oil of blessing on my head; You fill my cup to overflowing.*

David combined two earlier ideas in verse 5. He connected God's provision of physical needs with God's protection in times of trouble. God provided for David's needs (...prepare a meal...), and He would do it even as David's enemies were all around (...in front of my enemies...) Troubles may come, but they will not prevent God's provision. The Lord may cover our physical needs, or He might refresh our souls. Either way, we can experience God's blessings during our troubles.

David compared God's blessings with oil being poured over his head. In ancient Near Eastern cultures, many peoples used oil to anoint special individuals. Samuel used oil to anoint David (1 Samuel 16:12-13) and Saul (1 Samuel 10:1-2) as kings. People who deserved special blessings and recognition were also anointed with oil.

David expressed a very unique perspective by saying God would bless him with anointing oil. He believed God would choose him for special concern and recognition. The King of all creation would do more than guide and protect; He would also specifically and specially bless David.

God's provision comforts us, and often it goes beyond simply our needs. One of the special images from Psalm 23 is the idea of God filling David's cup until it overflowed. God sometimes does not stop with providing only what we need; occasionally, He gives us more than we need and overwhelms us with His blessings.

Verse 4 goes much further than the simple provision and protection we saw in verses 1-3. God Himself, the Creator, chooses people to become His. He blesses His people in a real, personal way. God blesses as He protects. He chooses us and pours Himself into us beyond anything we could ever imagine.

VERSE 6

⁶ *Surely Your goodness and love will be with me all my life, and I will live in the house of the LORD forever.*

David was confident God would never leave him. The word David used for love was a Hebrew word meaning good and loyal love. David knew God's love was not **temporary**, nor was it a selfish love. Human love can often fade. People can become self-centered and forget their affections. God's love is permanent and lasting. The Lord's love for David would continue forever and would be present each day of David's life.

David's words showed his faith in God. From personal experience, David knew what was required to be a good shepherd. Jesus is our Good Shepherd, who gave His life for his sheep (John 10:11). He demonstrated His goodness and love for us through His death on the cross, resurrection, and ascension.

David was also sure he would live in the house of the Lord forever. The house of the Lord was the temple, the place of worship and learning. David did not mean he would live in the temple. Instead he clearly intended to remain in a healthy, holy relationship with God for eternity.

Christians have a relationship with God that begins at salvation and continues through eternity. However, we must not forget that forever begins today. David planned to live each day with God by his side. Christians must make the same commitment to live with Christ forever, starting now. David did not say, “I will live off and on in the house of the Lord if I have time.” David’s commitment was daily, and our commitment should be exactly like his.

When you have guests visiting in your home, what are some things you do for them?

When we become Christians and “live in the house of the Lord,” what does God, as our host, do for us?

What is your response to God for His eternal care for you?

IN MY CONTEXT

Psalm 23 paints a beautiful picture of the relationship between God and His people. He loves us, cares for us, and provides for our needs. We accept His guidance, obey His commands, and find joy in His presence. Like a shepherd and his sheep, God and Christians have a close relationship.

We must remember: God does not need us. Like a shepherd, God is complete and perfect without His people (sheep). He chooses us, and cares for us simply because He loves us. God will protect us as He decides. He will guide us down rough paths and smooth trails. Through it all, God will be with us.

It may be easy to follow the Shepherd on the smooth trails, but what impact do the rough paths have on your willingness to follow the Shepherd?

When you have strayed or wanted to stop following the Shepherd, what helped you get back on the right path?

Think about your friends who do not know the Good Shepherd. What can you share with them from today's study that will help them want to know and follow the Good Shepherd?

MEMORY VERSE

"The LORD is my shepherd; I have everything I need."

—Psalm 23:1



Session 4

OUR RESPONSE

Thanksgiving is the proper response to God's answer to our prayers.

PSALM 138:1-8

FIRST THOUGHTS

Why do we thank God? Usually, we thank Him for specific things. We are grateful for a new job or for an interpreter at the doctor's office. By thanking Him for what He does for us, we show **gratitude**. God is far above us, but He still cares for us.

Thanking God for what He does is normal. As we read Psalm 138, let us consider something a little different. What does it mean to thank God for who He is? We are happy to receive things from God, but how can we be happy about His character?

David shows deep gratitude for both God's actions and God's character. David relied on God's actions to help him understand God's character. He expressed his gratitude through song. Let us see how we can learn from David's example.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

David wrote Psalm 138. Just like Psalm 23, this psalm is a song or prayer of thanksgiving. David thanked God and explained why he was thankful. As usual, David seemed to write from his own personal experience with the Lord while sharing important lessons that benefit everyone.

We do not know at what point in David's life he wrote this. The description before verse 1 does not give us any clues about the date. David could have written this while working as a shepherd, or during the years he ran away from Saul.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. I Will Thank (Psalm 138:1-3)

VERSE 1

¹*LORD, I will thank You with all my heart; I will sing to You before the gods.*

David begins with a promise to thank the Lord with all his heart. His thankfulness was not only through prayer. David was also willing to sing in thankfulness. He was not ashamed of his gratitude. We know this because David did not care who saw him sing. David would sing about his thankfulness in front of anyone who watched (...before the gods). In 2 Samuel 6:14-16, we see how David's actions of praising God matched these words in Psalm 138.

What does it mean to thank the Lord with all your heart? In the Book of Psalms, the idea of doing something for the Lord with all your heart comes up at least nine times. Proverbs 3:5 mentions all my heart and so does 1 Kings 14:8. The reference in 1 Kings 14 describes David's character, how he obeyed the Lord with all his heart.

Moses defined what it meant to do something completely. In Deuteronomy 6:5, Moses commanded the people of Israel to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, and strength. Jesus quoted this verse when a Pharisee asked, "What is the greatest commandment?" (Matthew 22:36). If we use Moses' definition, all of the references in the Book of Psalms, the description of David's obedience, and Jesus' quotes, we can develop a more complete understanding of David's praise.

David praised God with everything he did, said, believed, and felt. David used his mind and thoughts to thank God. He thanked God through his actions and words. He poured his thankfulness out through his emotions. In every possible way, David thanked the Lord.

What would true thankfulness look like today? We thank God when we pray, of course, but what would a song of thanksgiving look like in a Deaf church? How can we show true thankfulness in our emotions or our actions? The Bible seems to clearly expect us to pour out our thankfulness in every possible way.

David mentioned praising God's name to the gods. Some Bibles translate this as angels or heavenly beings. David did not worship other gods. Likely, he referred to the false gods some nations worshiped. We will see in verse 4, David expected the nations of the world to know of God and His teaching. The idea of praising God before the gods of various countries fits nicely with sharing God's Word with different countries.

VERSE 2

²I will bow down facing Your holy Temple, and I will thank You for Your love and loyalty. You have made Your name and Your word greater than anything. On the day I called to You, You answered me. You made me strong and brave.

As part of David's praise, he bowed towards the temple. When we think of someone bowing to a thing, we usually imagine an idol or altar. The temple in Jerusalem was not built during David's lifetime. He had a desire to build the temple, but God told him that his son, Solomon, would build the temple (2 Chronicles 22:6-16). The word *temple* in this verse probably refers to the tent where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. Although there was not a temple at that time, David's thankfulness was for God's promises and the faith to believe a temple would be built.

The people of Israel closely linked God's name and presence with the temple in Jerusalem. In a different chapter, Psalm 132, David reminded the people God planned to remain in Jerusalem with them. When Solomon dedicated the temple to God, he called it a place for God to live forever (1 Kings 8:13). God's holy presence filled the temple that day (1 Kings 8:11).

David did not thank God for physical blessings in these verses. He was not expressing **gratitude** for protection or military victory. David thanked God for blessings and protection in other psalms. In Psalm 138, he thanked God for His love and His loyalty. David was grateful for these parts of God's character.

How did David know of God's love and loyalty? David knew about God's loyalty and love through His answers to David's prayers. Verse 3 does not say David prayed, but he wrote, "When I called to you..." Calling out to God is a part of prayer. When David called, God answered. God's actions showed God's character.

Deaf parents with hearing children often struggle to communicate with their children's friends who visit their home, their hearing friends who do

not know sign language or Deaf culture. Sometimes, though, the right visitor seems to understand. Maybe it's a girl who never learns sign language, but she wants to respect her friend's Deaf parents. Her good character drives her to interact visually in ways that communicate. Deaf parents might be impressed with the girl's action, but they are even more thankful for her sensitive character. The parents see the girl's good character through her actions.

Similarly, David thanked God for His great characteristics of love and loyalty. God's love is not like human love. God's love lasts longer. God's loyalty endures through good times and bad times. God loves us enough to forgive our repeated sins. He is faithful when we fail. Even when we are not faithful to Him, God remains loyal.

BIBLE SKILL: *Read Passages with Same Theme*

David praised God for His character, which he knew from observing God's actions. Many of the psalms written by David include words of praise and thanksgiving to God for His love, truth, and answered prayers. Read the following psalms and write why David wrote words of praise and thanksgiving to God.

Psalm 65:1-4 _____

Psalm 86:12-13 _____

Psalm 103:1-5 _____

Psalm 108:1-5 _____

Psalm 139:13-16 _____

Psalm 144:1-2 _____

Psalm 145 _____

What prayers has God answered in your life?

In what ways has God shown His love to you?

Write your own psalm of thanksgiving to God for answering your prayers and showing His love to you.

2. They Will Bow (Psalm 138:4-6)

VERSES 4-5

⁴ *LORD, let all the kings of the earth praise You when they hear the words You speak.*

⁵ *They will sing about what the LORD has done, because the LORD'S glory is great.*

David moved away from his own praise for God. David wanted the kings of the earth to praise and worship the Lord. More specifically, he wanted the kings to hear God's words and praise Him. We know the people of Israel were God's chosen people, so why did David want leaders around the world to praise God?

Israel was indeed God's chosen people, but for what goal? God intended for Israel to be a nation of priests for the world (Exodus 19:5-6). Priests did not lead and teach each other. Like pastors, priests served the people. God's plan was for the nation of Israel to serve as His teachers and spiritual leaders for the world. David understood God's plan for the world to know Him.

The Old Testament writers knew God wanted the entire world to know Him. Solomon's **dedication** of the temple included a prayer, "Then all the people of the world will know that the LORD is the only true God" (1 Kings 8:60). Psalm 145, Zechariah 2, Micah 4, and other passages talk about the day when all people will know the Lord. Jesus continued God's work in reaching the world. In Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus commanded the disciples to teach the entire world of Christ and His sacrifice.

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Church*

The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.

VERSE 6

⁶*Though the LORD is supreme, He takes care of those who are humble, but He stays away from the proud.*

God **exists** on a level far above us. He is supreme, above all things, people, and forces. Humanity cannot hope to reach God's level of creativity, intelligence, might, wisdom, and love. Even though God is mighty, He cares for the smallest things in our lives. God reaches out to those who are humble.

David connected three concepts: humility, help, and pride. Why does God only help humble people? A proud person does not accept help from others. A proud person cannot admit he needs help from anyone. Only people who are humble can admit they need help. A humble person can approach God for help with anything: health, emotions, sin, and more. A proud person rejects God's help, and God avoids the proud.

Read Isaiah 45:22-25.

What do these words mean for a Christian?

What do these words mean for someone who is stubborn and refuses to accept Christ?

What feelings do these words cause for you?

How will you respond to these feelings?

3. God Will Fulfill (Psalm 138:7-8)

VERSES 7-8

⁷ *LORD, even when I have trouble all around me, You will keep me alive. When my enemies are angry, You will reach down and save me by Your power.*

⁸ *LORD, You do everything for me. LORD, Your love continues forever. Do not leave us, whom You made.*

Verse 7 should seem familiar. David, the author of Psalm 138, wrote something similar in Psalm 23:4-5. David's life led him through very difficult experiences, but he always knew God was with him. David did not interpret being surrounded by enemies as a sign of God's abandonment.

David also showed humility in verse 7. David knew he could not save himself. Even though David was a strong and wise man, he knew only God could rescue him. David was not too proud to admit his need for God.

David closes the psalm by returning to the theme from verses 1-3. God's great character deserves praise. God shows His wonderful love through His care for David and those who worship Him. David deeply desired God's presence. He begged God never to leave His people.

How does humility show our dependence on God?

Do you struggle to accept God's help in your life? YES NO

Why or why not?

IN MY CONTEXT

We thank God for the food He gives us. We thank Him for healing, blessings, and good weather. We are correct to thank Him for His wonderful gifts and acts. We need to ask ourselves how often we praise God for being God. When was the last time we praised God, not for His works, but for His character?

We can love a person's actions, attitudes, and words without ever loving the person who does them. Likewise, we can love God's forgiveness, God's world, and God's blessings without ever loving and knowing God. God does not call us to love His works. He calls us to love Him. Loving God for His actions without loving Him is a dangerous habit. One step along that path is being thankful for His works and never being thankful just for Him.

Let us thank God for being who He is, and for sharing Himself with us.

What about God's character makes you thankful?

How does the knowledge that God is sovereign make you feel?

How will you respond to God and His sovereignty?

MEMORY VERSE

"LORD, I will thank you with all my heart; I will sing to you before the gods."

—Psalm 138:1



Session 5

HIS PRESENCE

Security is found in the assurance of God's presence.

PSALM 84:1-12

FIRST THOUGHTS

For more than 50 years, the National Parks Service has planned a special event to celebrate our country's freedom on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Every year, thousands of people excitedly travel to our nation's capital on July 4th to view memorials in honor of the soldiers of different wars, to learn about the history of the United States of America, and to celebrate our country's independence through a fireworks display. Many people come every year. They travel a long way to get to Washington, D.C., for this special celebration. They make the trip with excitement and anticipation for what they will see and hear.

Psalm 84 tells of a similar joy. The writer spoke of the joy of being in God's house, and spending time near Him. No matter how far the trip, people who journeyed to the temple to worship God experienced something special. The psalmist wanted to be in the presence of the Lord and invited the people to sing about that joy with him.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The introduction to Psalm 84 seems to give basic instruction to the choir leader. The people were to sing the song (psalm) with a musical instrument called a *gitteth*. Bible teachers disagree about what this word means exactly, but most commentaries interpret this word to mean a stringed instrument from the area around Gath, in the land of the Philistines.

The introduction also mentions the sons of Korah. Korah was a descendant of the family of Levi. The Levites were responsible for managing the tabernacle and later the temple. The sons of Korah mentioned in Psalm 84 were not Korah's children; too much time had passed for that. They were actually descendants of Korah's family. These sons were probably leaders in the music ministry of the temple.

Psalm 84 is a royal psalm. The words of a royal psalm usually praise God as King over His creation. Royal psalms are often joyful and emphasize positive themes.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. The Passion (Psalm 84:1-4)

VERSES 1-2.

¹*LORD All-Powerful, how lovely is Your Temple!*

²*I want more than anything to be in the courtyards of the LORD'S Temple. My whole being wants to be with the living God.*

The psalmist began with praise! He rejoiced in the beauty of God's temple, the place where all Israel came to worship. The writer wanted with all his heart to be in the temple area. Other translations use words like *yearn* and *faints* to describe the writer's passion. He desperately wanted to be in the temple.

The courts of the temple were areas of the temple. Solomon built the temple with inner courts and outer courts. The inner courts were for the priests. The outer courts were for the people who came to worship. The psalmist may have been permitted into both the inner and outer courts. He wanted more than anything to be in the temple of the living God.

We can use verse two to help us understand the meaning of verse one. The writer praised God for the beauty of His temple. What made the temple so lovely? The Lord was there. Why did the writer want to be in the temple courts? He wanted to be with God and worship God. Being in God's presence was more important than the building or the place.

The temple was unique for the Israelites. It was the spiritual center of the nation. It helped remind the people of their special relationship with God.

The priests needed a place to manage the **sacrifice system** God established. The temple was that special place.

Do we need a special place for worship today? In Acts 17, Paul spoke to the people of Athens about God. He explained in verse 24, God “does not live in temples built by human hands.” Instead of a physical temple, we are the temple of God. His Spirit rests on Christians and not on a physical location (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). We do not need a special temple or building for our church, but there is nothing wrong with having a special place of worship.

VERSES 3-4

³ *The sparrows have found a home, and the swallows have nests. They raise their young near your altars, LORD All-Powerful, my King and my God.*

⁴ *Happy are the people who live at Your Temple; they are always praising You.*

Do you have a friend who has something you wish you could have? Maybe your best friend married a Christian Deaf person, and you wish you could meet someone like that. Perhaps a classmate had the chance to attend Gallaudet. Maybe you felt a little jealous that you did not have the same opportunity. You see your friends with wonderful experiences. You are happy for them, but you wish you could have the same thing.

The psalmist was similarly envious of the birds who lived in the temple area. They built their nests and homes inside the temple **complex**. Their babies hatched and grew close to the holy altars used for worship. In the place the Israelites used to honor their God and King, the birds flew, built nests, and lived. They lived where the writer wanted to live. They lived inside the temple where God made His presence known.

People also lived in the temple. The priests and temple workers from the **tribe** of Levi stayed at the temple. The guards were on duty at the temple. The temple had rooms for sleeping and eating, reserved for people who worked within the temple area. The writer of Psalm 84 wanted to be one of those people who lived at the temple. He loved being in the temple because it was the home of God's presence.

Describe a time when you felt God's presence in worship. What made that experience different from other times of worship?

Being the “temple of the Holy Spirit,” when and how are ways the believer can worship God?

BIBLE SKILL: *Companion Psalms*

Most chapters in the Bible depend on the chapters before and after. However, each psalm stands alone as a complete thought. Psalm 84 talks about the writer's desire to be in a place of worship. Two other psalms, called companion psalms, also express a desire to be in the house of the Lord. Psalms 42 and 43 are companions to Psalm 84. Read Psalms 42 and 43. Write down which verses seem to match the theme of Psalm 84.

Psalm 42 _____

Psalm 43 _____

2. The Priority (Psalm 84:5-7)

VERSES 5-7

⁵*Happy are those whose strength comes from You, who want to travel to Jerusalem.*

⁶*As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it like a spring. The autumn rains fill it with pools of water.*

⁷*The people get stronger as they go, and everyone meets with God in Jerusalem.*

The Jewish Law required every Israelite male to journey to the temple for worship and sacrifices. In Exodus 23:14-17, we can read Moses' words commanding Israelite men to appear at the temple for three festivals: the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover), the Feast of Harvest, and the Festival of Booths. These three events were important festivals for all Israelites.

For many people the trip to Jerusalem was long and hard. The roads were rocky. The travelers slept under the stars. They carried their food and water or hoped to find some along the way.

The psalmist sang about those making the trip to Jerusalem. He expected the travelers to be happy at the chance to travel to the holy city. Whether by donkey or by walking, **pilgrims** traveled the entire country to arrive in Jerusalem. When they became weak, God gave them strength. The prophet Isaiah, in Isaiah 40:29-31, supported what the writer of Psalm 84 said. God gives strength to those who serve Him.

The road to Jerusalem passed through a valley just before the end of the trip. The Valley of Baca had no water most of the year. In the fall, rains came through the area, leaving pools and streams. The rains refreshed the Valley of Baca. In the same way, God's blessings refreshed and nourished His faithful worshippers.

The psalmist knew the trip to the temple was long and hard. He also recognized the value of the **pilgrimage**. The trip would exhaust the Israelites, but through the trip God would **energize** the travelers. God offers strength in life for those who seek to worship Him.

KEY DOCTRINE: Pilgrimage

We know from the Book of Luke that Jesus and His family traveled from Nazareth in Galilee to Jerusalem every year for the Feast of the Passover. Read Luke 2:41-52. Review maps of Jesus' day to see the distance of that pilgrimage. Read in a concordance about pilgrimages. How long was the trip for Jesus and His family? What challenges and dangers did they face? As they traveled, did they prepare their hearts for worship? How? Now read Luke 2:41-52 again. As you read the verses, imagine yourself traveling with the group of pilgrims. What is God showing you about your heart for worship?

What challenges do believers experience while seeking to worship God?

When believers experience challenges, how does God help them?

3. The Prayer (Psalm 84:8-9)

VERSES 8-9

⁸ *LORD God All-Powerful, hear my prayer; God of Jacob, listen to me.*

⁹ *God, look at our shield; be kind to Your appointed king.*

The writer inserted a prayer into his psalm. The entire psalm points towards the Lord, but verses eight and nine are a request from the psalmist to God. Normally we separate our prayers and our songs into different parts of worship, but the psalmist combined the two.

This short prayer starts by naming God. The writer refers to the Lord as God All-Powerful. By referring to God as being mighty and powerful, the writer calls attention to how great God is. Later, the writer again names the Lord, God of Jacob. In this name, we can see God's greatness does not prevent Him from relating to people as individuals.

The writer had one request. He asked God to care for the king of Israel. God appointed the kings of Israel from the beginning (see 1 Samuel 10; 1 Samuel 16). God chose the right leader for His people. The psalmist asked for God to be kind to the shield of the people. By shield he meant the king.

The king's job was to lead the people. He was responsible to guide the people, and protect them. He protected the nation from invading armies. The king's duties also included leading the people spiritually by setting an example of godly worship. Through all these acts, the king shielded, or protected, the people from danger, disobedience, and divine punishment.

Who are our leaders today?

Whether you identified spiritual leaders or governmental leaders, what are some of their needs for prayer?

Write a prayer for one of our leaders.

4. The Presence (Psalm 84:10-12)

VERSE 10.

¹⁰One day in the courtyards of Your Temple is better than a thousand days anywhere else. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the Temple of my God than live in the homes of the wicked.

Throughout Psalm 84, the psalmist wrote of one major theme. That theme was the joy of being in God's presence. He wanted to live in the temple like the birds and the priests. In verse ten, the psalmist compared living in the temple with living anywhere else in the world.

Spending a single day in the house of the Lord was better than anything. If someone had offered the psalmist 1,000 days at the beach, or at the mall, he would have rejected the offer. Being a servant (doorkeeper) outside the

temple was better than living in a fancy home filled with sinners. Have you ever watched parents and grandparents of a newborn baby standing outside the hospital nursery window? Even though they long to hold that baby, they have joy just watching him or her through the glass. The psalmist, even if he is outside the temple, shows that same kind of joy for being in God's presence.

VERSES 11-12

¹¹ *The LORD God is like a sun and shield; the LORD gives us kindness and honor. He does not hold back anything good from those whose lives are innocent.*

¹² *LORD All-Powerful, happy are the people who trust You!*

The psalmist closed his song by praising God for His great love and protection. He compared God to the sun because God gives light and life in the same way the sun gives light and life. He compared God to a shield because God protected the nation.

As the guide and protector, God loved His people. He was kind to them. He honored those who worshiped Him. People who lived holy lives received every blessing God offered. They were blessed and happy because God rewarded their trust in Him.

**If God protects His people, does this mean believers will never suffer?
Why or why not?**

How does God protect us today?

What should be our response to God's presence?

IN MY CONTEXT

In Hebrews 10:25, the author encouraged people to continue attending regular church gatherings. He knew some Christians stopped coming together. He did not want his readers to follow their example.

What reason did the author of Hebrews give for wanting the people to come together?

The author of Psalm 84 also wanted God's people to gather at the temple. He expected everyone to travel to Jerusalem to worship God in His house.

What reasons did the psalmist give for wanting to be in the temple?

Do these two passages agree with each other, or do they conflict with each other? Gathering to worship the Lord is part of our duty, and our joy, as Christians. However, when we gather we can also support one another through life's hardships. We can care for one another and worship together.

Why do people enjoy being in God's house?

Why do some people not have the same joy in God's presence as the author of Psalm 84?

How does Hebrews 10:25 support Psalm 84?

MEMORY VERSE

"LORD All-Powerful, happy are the people who trust You!"

—Psalm 84:12



Session 6

THE CREATOR

Believers should worship God above all else, because He is **sovereign**.

PSALM 95:1-11

FIRST THOUGHTS

What does it mean to worship someone? Worship has two parts, an attitude (noun) and an action (verb). The attitude of worship means to have a strong belief that someone is worthy of worship. The action of worship means how we express that attitude. We can have a worshipful attitude without actions, and we can also show worshipful actions without the attitude.

Consider the Deaf actor Sean Berdy. Many Deaf look up to him. They admire him for his work as an actor, and for overcoming barriers all Deaf people face. If they met Sean, Deaf people might be too stunned to talk to him. They might have an attitude of awe and respect (worship), even if they do not act on that attitude. But sometimes people will show the correct actions without having the right attitude. Have you watched strong-willed children being punished? They may sit in the “time-out chair,” but their expressions and attitudes do not show respect.

To worship God, we must put attitude with action. God expects us to have worshipful hearts as we worship in action. Amos 5:22-23 tells us about God’s hatred for empty acts of worship. Jesus criticized Jews who praised God with what they said without having a worshipful attitude.

As we study Psalm 95, we will learn how the psalmist expects us to worship. Remember that the writer of Psalm 95 assumed his listeners worshiped God with their hearts and their actions. We will examine our own approach to worship in today's lesson as well.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Psalm 95 is an **enthronement** psalm. It celebrates God's position as King over all creation. As you read Psalm 95, notice the ways the psalmist exalts and praises God as ruler over all things.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. What (Psalm 95:1-2)

VERSES 1-2

¹ *Come, let's sing for joy to the LORD. Let's shout praises to the Rock who saves us.*

² *Let's come to Him with thanksgiving. Let's sing songs to Him,*

The psalm begins with a call to joyful singing. Some Bible teachers believe this introduction means the author wrote this after God saved the people from some danger. When God rescues us from some trouble, often our first response is to joyfully thank Him for His help.

Praising God is not a dark, sad experience. The psalmist called for the people to sing for joy! He wanted the Israelites to shout their praises to God Almighty. The worshipers at the temple needed to sing songs to Him. The author expected an active, joyful, singing process in worship.

Verses one and two include four sentences. Each sentence clearly requires us to point our songs and praise toward God. We should sing for joy to the Lord. Our praises go to the Rock. We go to Him with thanksgiving and sing songs to Him. When we sing in church, our hearts and words should point toward God and only God.

Consider the songs we sing in our Deaf churches. Compare the experience to what the writer of Psalm 95 expected. Are our songs joyful? Are we enthusiastic? Do our songs focus on God?

If you are not joyful and excited about singing in worship, how can you fix this? The first step is to examine your heart. Do you have an attitude of worship? The second step is to consider your actions. Are your songs expressing praise and worship? Could you write new songs, or express your praises to God in ways that are not musical? Part of our challenge as Christians is to find better ways of relating to God.

BIBLE SKILL: *Singing the Psalms*

The Book of Psalms was Israel's first hymnbook. Various writers filled the book with songs and hymns for the people. They sang in groups and as individuals.

Could we sing the psalms in our worship today? The psalms follow a different pattern than our music, but we could probably find ways to sing from the Book of Psalms. Look at these psalms and try to find ways to sign these in ASL as a part of worship. Perhaps you could sing only a few verses instead of the entire psalm.

Psalms 23

Psalms 100

Psalms 19:1-4

What is the Deaf way to sing songs and shout praises to God during worship?

How can we make sure our attitudes and actions are right during worship?

Discuss this idea with your class.

2. Who (Psalm 95:3-5)

VERSES 3-5

³*because the LORD is the great God, the great King over all gods.*

⁴*The deepest places on earth are His, and the highest mountains belong to Him.*

⁵*The sea is His because He made it, and He created the land with His own hands.*

Whom do we worship with our praises? We sing to God, but who is He? The writer of Psalm 95 reminded the people through song who God is and what

His character is. He reminded the worshipers of three characteristics of God: His greatness, His mastery over the world, and His role as Creator.

In the ancient world, many different nations worshiped different gods. Most people thought their god was powerful, and the gods of other nations were also powerful. Few people thought their own god was better than all others. We can see an example of this attitude in 1 Kings 20:23-28.

The writer of Psalm 95 taught that God rules over everyone and everything. God is King over all gods, idols, and kingdoms. God is the supreme King.

The role of king was the highest, most powerful role a person could have in ancient Israel. People obeyed the king's commands without question. God is higher than kings. He is above and over everyone. God's supreme position is one of His characteristics.

God rules over everything because He made everything. The lands where the people live came from the Lord. God made the oceans, and everything in them. He is the Almighty Creator and we can worship Him as Creator.

As we praise God through song and prayer, we should remember who He is. God is king over all creation, and His word is law. He is the master of all things. He created everything. This is the God we worship.

KEY DOCTRINE: *God*

There is one and only one living and true God. He is an intelligent, spiritual, and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe.

God is sovereign. This means He is king, supreme ruler, and lawgiver for the entire universe. He made everything, and to Him everything belongs. His position as sovereign king over all people means we must obey Him. However, God uses His sovereignty to share His mercy with us. We can praise Him as king, and thank Him for using His power for our good.

What are your thoughts about God when you read Psalm 139:13-16?

What words or signs can we use in worshiping God as our Creator?

How (Psalm 95:6-7a)

VERSES 6-7a

⁶ *Come, let's worship Him and bow down. Let's kneel before the LORD who made us,*
⁷ *because He is our God and we are the people He takes care of, the sheep that He tends.*

Why does the Bible frequently mention bowing and kneeling when worshiping? Should we bow and kneel during church worship services? Is this a cultural issue or something that applies to us today?

In many cultures, physical **posture** shows people's attitudes. During weddings, people stand as the bride enters. We stand when the judge enters a courtroom. We kneel to beg forgiveness. We sit up straight when the principal enters the classroom. We slouch when we are bored in school.

The psalmist knew about the relationship between our posture and our attitudes. He assumed everyone gathering for worship had the proper internal view of God (see Introduction to the Unit), so he called for everyone to express their inner attitude through their posture.

Whom were they worshiping? They worshiped the King of all creation. We bow before kings, right? Then let us bow before God. We kneel when begging for something—love, forgiveness, or attention. Why not kneel before God as we beg for His attention and protection?

Why do some people bow at the waist when they meet important people?

Why do some people stand up to meet important leaders?

Should we change our posture when we worship, pray, and praise God? Why or why not?

How can we use our bodies to show respect and awe for God and still use our hands for communication?

4. When (Psalm 95:7b-11)

VERSES 7b-9

⁷*Today listen to what He says:*

⁸*“Do not be stubborn, as your ancestors were at Meribah, as they were that day at Massah in the desert.*

⁹*There your ancestors tested Me and tried Me even though they saw what I did.*

The Israelites knew the history of their people and their nation. The psalmist reminded the people what happened in years past. He wanted the Israelites to remember the mistakes their ancestors made at Meribah and Massah.

The Old Testament records two incidents at a place with two names, Meribah and Massah. The first happened in Exodus 17:1-7, just a few months after the Israelites left Egypt. The second happened more than 40 years later in Numbers 20:1-13.

In each situation, the people complained to Moses about the lack of water. The area usually had water, but the springs were dry. The Israelites accused Moses of bringing them out of Egypt—a land of plenty—into the desert to die. Moses prayed to God, and He used Moses to bring water to the people through a miracle.

As the nation wandered the desert, God cared for the Israelites. He expected them to respond with worship, but they did not. The Israelites very quickly forgot what God had done for them. They complained against His leadership. When they had problems, they did not show faith or praise God. Instead, the people complained.

Verse eight warned the Israelites not to forget the lessons their ancestors learned. “Don’t be stubborn,” the psalmist wrote. God cared for them in the same way a shepherd cares for sheep. The psalmist quoted God and reminded the people of their past mistakes. He begged them not to make the same mistakes again.

VERSES 10-11

¹⁰*“I was angry with those people for forty years. I said, ‘They are not loyal to Me and have not understood My ways.’*

¹¹*I was angry and made a promise, ‘They will never enter My rest.’”*

The psalmist continued quoting God in these verses. God's response to the Israelites at Massah and Meribah was to punish them. They refused to worship Him because they were not loyal to Him. They had not learned enough about His character and ways He cared for them. The Israelites refused to honor God's greatness and His care for them. So God decided they would not enter His rest.

We usually understand the word *rest* for the Israelites to mean the promised land of **Canaan**. The promised rest for the Israelites was Canaan, of course, but it also included all of God's blessings. God promised the people their own lands. He also promised peace, blessings, and a personal relationship with Him. The Israelites who refused to worship God at Massah and Meribah never experienced the full blessings God planned for them.

When should we worship God? Is worship something we do at church only? The Israelites who rebelled at Massah and Meribah probably worshiped God in song at the proper times. However, when things did not go their way, they did not worship. They only worshiped when they felt like worshiping. They worshiped when things were smooth and easy. God wants our worship at all times. Whether we experience blessing or punishment, God is worthy of our worship.

What can interrupt a believer's attitude of worship?

How can we maintain an attitude of worship individually and as a part of the church?

IN MY CONTEXT

Praise is every believer's responsibility. Praise happens when a person offers songs, prayers, and respect to God. How do most individuals praise God? Do you sing while cleaning the kitchen? Do your songs focus on Him or on your own feelings?

What about your church? Look at the songs you sign during worship. Are your songs focused on God and His position as King? If a stranger entered your worship service, would he understand more about God simply by watching your songs?

Carefully examine your approach to songs and praise. Find ways to improve your songs. Write new songs or change the way you sign songs to Him. Remember, God is the center of our worship and we must work to make sure our praises point people to Him.

What are ways that we can worship God in our everyday activities?

Does your Deaf church worship and sing praises the way the psalmist explains? YES NO

How can your church improve worship?

Describe the God we worship.

How does God's sovereignty influence our worship of Him?

MEMORY VERSE

"Come, let's worship Him and bow down. Let's kneel before the LORD who made us."

—Psalm 95:6



Session 7

GOD REVEALED

God reveals Himself through His creation and His Word.

PSALM 19:1-14

FIRST THOUGHTS

How do we know about God? Where do we get information about God's character, personality, and abilities? Learning to know God can be more challenging than learning about our friends and neighbors. We cannot see God in the same way we can see our friends and neighbors.

God provides two ways for us to know Him. He shows us the work He has done. The natural world is always with us. We can learn about our Creator by studying and loving His creation. Also, we have printed copies of what God has told us about Himself. The Bible, both Old Testament and New Testament, is God's explanation of Himself to us.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The introduction to Psalm 19 names David as the author. The introduction shows us the psalm was for use in worship. David chose worship leaders to help guide the singing in the temple. Psalm 19 was a song the people sang.

Psalm 19 is mainly about **revelation**. David explored the ways God showed Himself to the Israelite people through nature and through His laws. David believed the revelation of God should impact our lives. He ended his psalm with a few thoughts about how he responded to God's revelation.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Seen in Creation (Psalm 19:1-6)

VERSES 1-4a

¹*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the skies announce what His hands have made.*

²*Day after day they tell the story; night after night they tell it again.*

³*They have no speech or words; they have no voice to be heard.*

⁴*But their message goes out through all the world; their words go everywhere on earth.*

Where can we look to find **evidence** of God? How do we know He is powerful or creative? David believed the Israelites could find evidence of God in the world around them.

The heavens in verse one referred to the sky above us. The skies show us what God made. Each morning, the sunrise announces a new opportunity to see evidence of God's work. Each night, we can see the moon and stars prove God's creative ability and power.

Look up at the sky. We see the sun, giving life and light to our world. We see the moon, controlling the tides. The sky can be blue, gray, black, orange, and pink. The stars light up the night sky, especially far away from cities and campfires. The clouds drift past us, giving shade and rain. We see leaves and clouds move through the air, pushed by an invisible wind.

David emphasized something very important. Nature communicates the existence of God without words or language. Shepherds in Israel saw the same sun as peasants in China and fishermen in Greece. The message of His glory is clear to all people of any language, any reading level, Deaf or hearing.

Nature is not a god, something we worship. Popular movies and social movements talk about Mother Earth. Environmentalists sometimes ask us to respect nature. Instead, we should respect the God who created everything. Also, God is not a part of nature. Many eastern religions view gods and nature as being all part of a single whole. We know God is outside of nature. He is not a part of the world He made.

David encouraged his readers to look to the skies for proof of God's work and power. The natural world is a way God clearly communicates His

power, His creativity, and His beauty. As Christians, we can appreciate God's character as we see it in nature, but we must never make the mistake of worshipping creation.

New Testament writers agreed with David. They knew God revealed His presence and character through nature. In Romans 1:18-23, Paul described people who knew something of God, even if they did not know everything. They knew enough to understand He existed. They had some understanding of His character. But they chose to worship nature instead of worshipping God. Paul agreed with David. He said God's character was obvious in the natural world. But people chose to do evil instead of worshipping the Lord.

VERSES 4b-6

⁴*The sky is like a home for the sun.*

⁵*The sun comes out like a bridegroom from his bedroom. It rejoices like an athlete eager to run a race.*

⁶*The sun rises at one end of the sky and follows its path to the other end. Nothing hides from its heat.*

David **shifted** his focus from the sky to the sun. He compared the sun to three different kinds of people. First, David said the sun lived in the sky like someone who made his home among the stars. Second, David compared the sun to a groom preparing for a wedding. In our culture today, we focus attention on the bride. However, wedding traditions during the writing of this psalm centered on the finely dressed groom leaving to go and bring his bride back to his home, often at night with his groomsmen carrying torches and shouting. Finally, David said the sun was like an athlete prepared to run a race. No matter which example you prefer, the sun follows the same path from east to west.

The sun is the most dominant feature of the sky. It is larger than the moon and brighter than the stars. The sun follows the path God planned. The sun is eager to obey the Lord, doing His work with excitement.

Today, we can still see parts of God's character by studying the natural world. We cannot learn everything about God by studying the sky and rivers. We cannot see His love, justice, or mercy. We learn nothing about Jesus by watching birds or taking pictures of mountains. The world shows us enough of God's character to point us toward Him, but not enough for salvation.

BIBLE SKILL: *God Speaks*

Psalm 19 is about how God reveals Himself to us through nature. This is not the only way God has spoken to His people. He used various methods to communicate His plans and will to people throughout history. Look at some Bible passages and answer the question, "How did God communicate?"

Genesis 41:15-16 _____

Exodus 3:1-4 _____

Numbers 22:27-31 _____

Daniel 5:1-6 _____

Hebrews 1:1-2 _____

2 Peter 1:21 _____

Acts 9:1-6 _____

When we look at nature and think about God, what can we learn about His power and character?

How can we help others to learn of God through created nature?

Discuss this as a class.

2. Seen in His Word (Psalm 19:7-11)

VERSES 7-11

⁷*The teachings of the LORD are perfect; they give new strength. The rules of the LORD can be trusted; they make plain people wise.*

⁸*The orders of the LORD are right; they make people happy. The commands of the LORD are pure; they light up the way.*

⁹ *Respect for the LORD is good; it will last forever. The judgments of the LORD are true; they are completely right.*

¹⁰ *They are worth more than gold, even the purest gold. They are sweeter than honey, even the finest honey.*

¹¹ *By them your servant is warned. Keeping them brings great reward.*

David changed his focus suddenly in verse seven. He spent the first six verses telling the people how to know the basics of God's character through looking at the natural world. In verses seven through eleven, David used six different phrases to emphasize a more specific **revelation** of God. Through this more precise revelation, God's people can know Him better.

David started with the Lord's teachings. The lessons we learn from God directly from His word are without mistake or flaw. We can trust God's Word to be without any errors. When we depend on His teachings, we can find the spiritual and mental strength to endure hardships, sin, and persecution.

Next, David showed the Israelites God's rules. We can trust His rules and rely on them. David believed knowing the rules God gives us will make normal, simple people become wiser. How could knowing God's rules make people wiser?

Consider the many sign language students who visit Deaf churches and clubs. They enter without really knowing the rules of the community. It may take them many years of observing and developing friendships before they understand and follow the cultural rules. But understanding the rules makes them smarter and wiser.

The next two points are similar. God's orders are right, meaning they are completely correct. God's commands are pure, without any sort of imperfection. If we obey His commands, we will follow the correct pathway through life. Obeying His pure commands will lead us to a pure life. That life brings us happiness even as we experience heartache and trouble.

The final two points relate to respect and God's judgment. Some Bibles translate this verse to say fear of the Lord. Fear means a healthy respect and awe for God. Anyone who fears and respects God will obey and worship Him, both in this life and the eternal life God promised.

The psalmist summarizes these verses by stating that God's teachings, rules, orders, commands and judgments are more valuable than gold and sweeter than honey. God's Word is the true treasure that completes our understanding of Him and His plan for salvation. It is God's Word that shows us how to have eternal life.

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Scriptures*

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction.

What events in life cause people to spend more time reading and following God's Word?

How can we show God and other people that we treasure His Word?

3. Celebrated in His People (Psalm 19:12-14)

VERSES 12-13

¹² *People cannot see their own mistakes. Forgive me for my secret sins.*

¹³ *Keep me from the sins of pride; don't let them rule me. Then I can be pure and innocent of the greatest of sins.*

In these verses of Psalm 19, David examined how God's character and laws applied to his life and to all of our lives.

David admitted his blindness to his own sins. David's secret sins were those mistakes he made without knowing his own weaknesses. David knew he sinned, but did not always understand how. How could David sin without realizing it?

In our churches, we may have a time to share prayer concerns. Sometimes group members hear a prayer request and then talk about it to someone else. This becomes gossip, which is considered a sin. Maybe the person sharing the information did not mean for it to turn into gossip, or they may have sinned without realizing it.

David begged God to save him from sins. David was not only asking for forgiveness. He wanted to be saved from future sins. Specifically, David asked God to save him from sins of pride. Pride motivated David to count the people in Israel, which led to God's punishment (2 Samuel 24).

VERSE 14

¹⁴ I hope my words and thoughts please you. LORD, you are my Rock, the one who saves me.

David closed this very personal part of the psalm with a prayer of hope. He wanted to please God with his thoughts and words. David knew only God could save him from sins, both past and future. David trusted God for forgiveness.

We have learned to treasure God's Word in this Psalm. John 1:14 shows us that God's Word became a person. That person is Jesus. Jesus is the true **revelation** of God and our hope for forgiveness of sin.

Why do people overlook their own sins?

Has anyone ever helped you see your own sins? How did they help?

How can we explain to our unbelieving friends that Jesus is God's Word and that forgiveness and freedom come through Him?

IN MY CONTEXT

Very often we drift through life without examining the world around us. We enjoy God's creation, but never study the world to help understand Him better. We also fail to study His word. We have God's own description of Himself and His wonderful acts. But some of us only read our Bibles on Sunday.

Even more importantly, we have God's Son, Jesus, who became a man just like us. Every part of His life, death, and resurrection is God's Word that became real in our world and in our lives.

We have a responsibility to know God. We also have many opportunities to know Him. We have access to more print, more video, more Bible studies and lessons than any group of Deaf people in the history of the world. Why do we fail to study God's world and His Word?

What are different ways people respond to God's created nature?

What are different ways people respond to God's Word?

What are different ways people respond to God's offer of forgiveness and freedom through Jesus Christ?

What response does God desire from us?

MEMORY VERSE

"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the skies announce what His hands have made."

—Psalm 19:1



Session 8

HIS LOVE

God's unchanging love gives us reasons to celebrate.

PSALM 136:1-5,10-15,23-26

FIRST THOUGHTS

A central concept in understanding the nature of God is His loving kindness. The Hebrew word for loving kindness is *hesed*. Some spell the word chesed or even kessed. God shows a perfect love that never ends. Even if we do not love Him, God still loves us. His love is a part of His character He shares with us.

The history books of the Old Testament tell us all the wonderful things God did for humanity, especially for His chosen people, the Israelites. We can study God's great acts as a way of learning more about Him and His character. The writer for Psalm 136 used the Israelites' history to help them understand God's great love for them and for all creation.

Knowing God's character should inspire us to praise Him. We can thank Him for His wonderful acts and perfect character. As we study Psalm 136, picture in your mind what an Israelite worshiper would have felt as he sang about God's great works and wonderful love.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Different books of the Bible have different purposes. For example, 1 and 2 Samuel are mostly history books showing God's great acts in leading His people. Other books are for teaching, such as Hebrews or 1 Corinthians. As we already learned, Psalms is a collection of songs and hymns used in worship. Some psalms are perfect for either one person to sing or for many people to sing together.

Psalm 136 is a hymn for the people to sing together. As you read this hymn, please notice the repeated lines. Each verse has the phrase "His love continues forever." Likely this hymn was for two groups to sing together, taking turns. One group sang the first line of each verse. The other group sang the chorus (or refrain), His love continues forever.

Reading this psalm can be a little boring for some people. The writer says the same thing over and over, His love continues forever. Remember, these are the words for people to sing. This is not a chapter for history or doctrine. This is a song of praise!

We do not know for sure who wrote Psalm 136. David was very interested in temple worship. This song is almost certainly a temple worship song, but we have no idea who created this hymn.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. In Creation (Psalm 136:1-5)

VERSES 1-3

¹ Give thanks to the LORD because He is good. His love continues forever.

² Give thanks to the God of gods. His love continues forever.

³ Give thanks to the LORD of lords. His love continues forever.

The subject of Psalm 136 is God. The author focused on God through the entire psalm. Which god was he writing about? People worshiped different gods in the ancient world. The Israelites often struggled to worship the right god, as we know from reading the Old Testament. To remove all confusion, the author clearly identified and described God.

God is the only One who is always good, but the most amazing thing about His goodness is He is good to us. God could be good without sharing His goodness. He could ignore us, but He chooses to shower us with His goodness. His goodness is a part of His constant love.

God is the One above everyone and everything else (verses 2-3). The writers of the Old Testament frequently mentioned idols and false gods: Baal, Ashtoreth, Molech, and others. Repeatedly, the writers of various psalms

emphasized God's **supremacy** and His position above all false gods and idols. The Israelites had a responsibility to respect God because of His place above everyone and everything.

While most Christians do not struggle with idol worship, we often put something other than God at the top of our **priority** list. For some families, children's sports teams are more important than Sunday worship. Other Deaf church members value their comfort more than God. They use a little bad weather as an excuse not to attend church. We value gathering wealth more than supporting His missions throughout the world. We promote Deaf culture and community more than we promote Christ and salvation.

Even if we do not place God at the top of our priority list, God is faithful. His love always endures. His goodness is a sign of His great love. His place at the top of all creation is also proof of His love. He cares for us as God of all things.

VERSES 4-5

⁴*Only He can do great miracles. His love continues forever.*

⁵*With His wisdom He made the skies. His love continues forever.*

God does great miracles. His first great miracle was creating the universe. Read the story of the creation of the world in Genesis 1:1–2:3. God spoke the world into existence. God created life in a very precise order to ensure survival. He made light first, then land and water. Plants, which depend on the light, came next. Animals, to eat the plants, followed. Finally, He created man and woman. Creating the world was a miracle of power, creativity, and intelligence. God did His work in a purposeful way.

A Deaf couple watched their daughter grow through the years. She would draw pictures for her mother. Her mother bought a special picture frame where she stored and displayed her daughter's creations. Every year she chose a new picture to put in the frame. After many years, the daughter took the picture frame down and looked at her drawings. When she was young, her drawings were very basic, but as she became older, her creations improved.

God's creation was not like the girl's drawings. God's creation did not improve over time. There was no need for God to change or improve His creation. His creation was perfect from the beginning. We can see God's love in His miraculous creation and know His love will endure. We can trust that His plans for our life are good.

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Father*

He is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise.

How do God's miracles show His great love?

What other Bible verses assure us that God's plans for us are good and trustworthy?

Discuss this idea with your class.

2. In Conquests (Psalm 136:10-15)

VERSES 10-15

¹⁰ *He killed the firstborn sons of the Egyptians. His love continues forever.*

¹¹ *He brought the people of Israel out of Egypt. His love continues forever.*

¹² *He did it with His great power and strength. His love continues forever.*

¹³ *He parted the water of the Red Sea. His love continues forever.*

¹⁴ *He brought the Israelites through the middle of it. His love continues forever.*

¹⁵ *But the king of Egypt and his army drowned in the Red Sea. His love continues forever.*

The Israelite people left Egypt after many years of slavery. The Egyptian king (the Pharaoh) refused to allow the people to leave long enough to worship the Lord in the desert and oppressed the Israelites terribly. Most Israelites knew their own history, and the psalmist reminded them of God's great works in saving them. In the Book of Exodus we have the stories about the Israelites in Egypt. The author of Psalm 136 referred to these stories in verses 10-15.

The Israelite people, from the family of Jacob, were slaves in Egypt for over 400 years. When it was time for God to set His people free, He sent Moses and Aaron. God gave Moses the power to perform miracles. Eventually, God sent different plagues against the people of Egypt. He always ended the plagues when the Egyptians agreed to free the slaves. God demonstrated His **sovereign** power to both the Egyptians and the Israelites.

Eventually, God freed the Israelite slaves by killing the first-born children in Egyptian households (Exodus 12). The Egyptians allowed the Israelites to leave. His mighty acts to free the Israelites showed an everlasting love.

God's great love can be obvious to us. We see the ways He saves us from sin. We know He protects His people from different troubles and problems. He does not remove all **obstacles**. Like the Israelites, we face oppression, injustice, and poverty. His great power is enough to protect us as we suffer these things. Even God's acts of justice and punishment against those who oppose Him show His love. God is patient and merciful, waiting for unbelievers to repent.

BIBLE SKILL: *Cross-Referencing*

Have you ever been a part of a signed conversation where you did not know exactly what was happening? People were discussing places and events that you did not know anything about. You needed someone to explain the details to you.

Reading the Bible is often similar. Writers talk about past events or quote different books of the Bible. We must be willing to look through the Bible and read the different details if we want to understand everything. Looking back through the Bible to find background information is called cross-referencing.

Psalms 136 refers to many different verses and acts in the Old Testament. Look at some of these verses and relate them to the correct verse in Psalm 136.

Exodus 14:26-28 _____

Exodus 14:13-22 _____

Exodus 12:29-30 _____

3. In Compassion (Psalm 136:23-26)

VERSES 23-26

²³ *He remembered us when we were in trouble. His love continues forever.*

²⁴ *He freed us from our enemies. His love continues forever.*

²⁵ *He gives food to every living creature. His love continues forever.*

²⁶ *Give thanks to the God of heaven. His love continues forever.*

The Israelites had many examples of God's compassion for them. God chose Jacob and blessed him. God helped the Israelites grow from a small family into a great nation. God saved the Israelites from the Egyptian army (Exodus 14), famine (Exodus 16), lack of water (Exodus 17), and war (Exodus 17, Joshua 6). Over and over, God worked in the course of events to save His people from tragedy. He saved His people when they had bad attitudes, when they disobeyed, and when they grumbled and complained. God's love for us does not depend on our ability to be perfect.

Through Jesus' earthly ministry, we can see God's compassion for us. Why were people eager to follow Jesus? They could see that He loved them through the things He did. When a woman was caught in adultery, He rescued her from her enemies (John 8:3-11). Often Jesus provided food for people who followed Him and listened to His teaching (John 6:5-13, Mark 8:1-9, John 21:13).

God also provides food, water, and shelter for every living creature. Squirrels know where to find food and what to eat because God made them to know. God made the birds to know how to build nests and where to find food. God not only made the animals of the world, He created them to know how to find food and water no matter where they live.

We can understand how great God's compassion is when we remember something important. God does not need to show us compassion. God existed long before He made us, and His existence does not depend on showing compassion to us. He could show compassion to animals and angels without ever pouring His compassion and grace on humanity. He chose to love us and decided to give us the gift of His compassion. The greatest gift of His compassion is forgiveness through Jesus' death and resurrection.

How does God's protection show His love for us?



How can we trust God’s compassion and protection when we suffer problems and grief?

Tell your group an example of God’s compassion for you specifically?



IN MY CONTEXT

What hope would we have in life and death without the love of God? God's *hesed*, His continual loving kindness, gives us the hope of a future with Him. God loves us always and forever. He sent Christ into the world to free us from sin because He loved us so much.

The Israelites did not have a well-developed view of life after death. When the writers of the Old Testament wrote about God's love, they were usually thinking about His love during their lifetimes. In the Israelites' opinions, God's compassion and care were for this life.

We know God's love has prepared a place for us once we die, but if we only focus on God's future love, we are missing the point. God's provision, compassion, and care are for both this life, with all its troubles, and for the next life in heaven.

How did the author expect the people to use Psalm 136?

What evidence do you see in your own life of God's continuing love?

How can God show His love for others through us?

Psalm 136 talks about God's love, but we often talk about Jesus' love for us. Is there a difference?

MEMORY VERSE

"Give thanks to the LORD because He is good. His love continues forever."

—Psalm 136:1



Session

9

HIS FAITHFULNESS

We can trust God because He reigns eternally.

PSALM 146:1-10

FIRST THOUGHTS

When Deaf people gather to discuss future plans, sometimes a new Deaf friend will join the group. He or she might offer an opinion during the discussion. Most of the time, the group listens to his or her opinion, but will not rely on the Deaf visitor's ideas or plans. Why? We prefer to rely on people who have experience. Our leaders are men and women who have much experience. We do not want new leaders with no experience.

As we live we encounter troubles and problems. We usually rely on friends, family, and ourselves. Compared with God, our friends and family are like new people without much experience. God's eternal plans are better than our plans. His knowledge beats our knowledge. How should this influence our worship of God?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Psalms 146–150 are praise songs for the people to sing as part of worship. All five psalms begin and end with the phrase, “praise the Lord!” This statement

is a call to praise or a call to worship. The writer called the people and told them to offer praise to God. Next, the author usually explained why people should praise God. These psalms end with a reminder to praise the Lord.

Psalms 146 is a hymn, the closest thing to our modern worship songs. As each person sang the hymn, he or she praised God and encouraged others to praise the Lord. In corporate (group) worship, our songs point to God and also communicate to one another. The God-centered part of praise glorifies God **vertically** (from us to Him). Encouraging each other while we sing (sign) gives glory to God **horizontally** (from us to other believers).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. The Declaration (Psalm 146:1-2)

VERSES 1-2

¹*Praise the LORD! My whole being, praise the LORD.*

²*I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praises to my God as long as I live.*

What is our approach to praising God? Do we praise God during our worship services? Do we offer praises while we sing in ASL? Let's compare how we praise God with how the author of Psalm 146 praised Him.

The psalmist said he praised the Lord with his whole being. The key to understanding this phrase is to ask what the writer meant by whole being. As Deaf worshipers, we might interpret this to mean the writer praised God with his entire body. We use our hands and voices to sing praises to the Lord. In church we often praise God this way.

Our whole being is more than just our bodies. The author praised God all his life. This part of the psalm shows commitment to God. The psalmist is not planning to praise God only when everything in life is good or for a short time. Praising God with all his life is part of praising God with his whole being. Like the psalmist, we can praise God with all we are.

We can praise God through our attitudes. We praise Him for blessing us by being wise with our money. We praise God for our Deaf community by representing God as we interact with others. Everything we do, see, eat, read, and talk forms a part of our whole being. We can praise Him with all we are and all we do, day by day.

In the New Testament, Paul mentioned something similar to praising God daily in all we do. Paul gave advice to Christians. He wanted them to live daily as Christians. He said, "Always be joyful. Pray continually, and give thanks whatever happens" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18a). Like the psalmist, Paul encouraged worshipers to look to God always in every situation throughout their entire lives.

BIBLE SKILL: *Praise Hymns in Psalms*

Psalms 146–150 are praise hymns. Each psalm follows the same general pattern. First, the writer calls the people to praise the Lord. Second, the writer explains why people should praise God. Third, the author ends the psalm by reminding people to praise the Lord. Look at the following three praise hymns and find this pattern.

Psalm 146

Psalm 147

Psalm 148

What of God's character helps us to praise Him with our whole being all of our life?

How does praising God all our lives (Psalm 146) compare with Paul's encouragement to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)?

How would you define the word/sign *praise* for someone new to the Christian faith?

2. The Warning (Psalm 146:3-4)

VERSES 3-4

³*Do not put your trust in princes or other people, who cannot save you.*

⁴*When people die, they are buried. Then all of their plans come to an end.*

After opening Psalm 146 with a call to praise, the author began telling people why we should praise the Lord. God does things for us no one else can do. We can trust Him.

Verse three encourages us not to trust princes and people. In this verse, the princes are the leaders of nations. The psalmist did not believe God's people should rely on other human beings for salvation. The Bible shows us what happened when the Israelites trusted other people.

Isaiah warned against trusting Egypt for help against the Assyrian army (Isaiah 31). Even though God saved the city of Jerusalem from the Assyrians (2 Chronicles 32), King Hezekiah wanted Egypt's help. Hezekiah trusted in the Egyptians, but they did not help him. Hezekiah also welcomed guests from the king of Babylon (2 Kings 20:12-18), but they did not help against the Assyrians, either.

People are unreliable. We cannot make our plans work. We cannot rely on our own work, our own efforts, or our own plans. As verse 4 says, eventually we die and our plans fall apart. Let us examine two examples of this.

The author of the Book of Ecclesiastes examined life and searched for meaning. He looked at all of his own wonderful achievements and became very upset. The author, King Solomon, was sad because he worked and planned, but knew he would die eventually. His plans would fail. His projects would fall apart. Someone who was not involved in the king's plans would inherit all of Solomon's money and homes.

Through King Solomon's words, we see what the psalmist knew. We should not rely on other people to save us. We should not trust in our plans for our future. Whom can we rely on every time? God. Whose plans will never fail? God's.

Does this mean we should never make plans? No, we can certainly make plans. As we make our plans, large and small, we should plan using God's wisdom. James 1:5 encourages us to ask God for wisdom. Using His wisdom to make plans is better than relying on our own wisdom.

What are ways people put their trust in our leaders instead of God?

What are some examples of disappointment or ruin that comes from putting our trust in others?

3. The Worthy One (Psalm 146:5-9)

VERSES 5-6

⁵*Happy are those who are helped by the God of Jacob. Their hope is in the LORD their God.*

⁶*He made heaven and earth, the sea and everything in it. He remains loyal forever.*

The writer compared two different groups of people. In verses three and four, he reminded us that people who rely too much on leaders or on their own plans would be disappointed. In verses five and six, the writer talked about people who rely on God.

People who rely on God will be happy. Some Bible translations say people who depend on God will be blessed. We learned about the similarities between blessed and happiness when we studied Psalm 1. God is powerful, and His plans never fail. God is eternal, and He will not die before His plans become reality. He does not fail, forget us, quit, or become unfaithful.

The writer also identified God very clearly. Many different nations and people groups lived around and among the Israelites. These different groups had their own gods and idols. The psalmist clearly pushed the Israelites to rely on the God of Jacob, not other gods and idols. The God of Jacob was YHWH (also spelled Yahweh). The word YHWH translates as the Lord in this verse. Literally, the psalmist says to rely on their God, YHWH. God's plans are greater than the nations and the world He made.

VERSES 7-9

⁷He does what is fair for those who have been wronged. He gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free.

⁸The LORD gives sight to the blind. The LORD lifts up people who are in trouble. The LORD loves those who do right.

⁹The LORD protects the foreigners. He defends the orphans and widows, but He blocks the way of the wicked.

Now we begin to see why the psalmist called the people to praise the Lord. God is eternal. He has always existed, and will always continue to exist. As we saw in the last section, God's eternal nature means we can rely on Him and His plans. God's plans and goals are as eternal as He is eternal. God's loyalty and faithful love will also endure forever.

The writer listed several different groups of people. He described the way God cares for them. He listed those who have been wronged, the hungry, the prisoners, the blind, those in trouble, foreigners, orphans, widows, and those who do what is right. What did these people have in common? In what way were all these people similar? Each person on the list was alone. They could not defend themselves.

Hungry people in Bible times were the poorest folks in society. Everyone knew poor people had no power. Those who suffered (the wronged) and prisoners had no defense against anyone who would attack them. Widows and orphans had no father or husband to provide for them. Even people who did what was right sometimes needed protection against sinners who persecuted them. God protected and defended the poorest, weakest, most

ignored people in society. They could rely on God's faithful loving care, knowing God's protection would never fail.

What stories from the Bible show God's faithfulness to the widows, orphans, hungry people, prisoners, or foreigners?

How did these people demonstrate their trust in God?

In what ways can we demonstrate that we trust God?

4. The Reality (Psalm 146:10)

VERSE 10

¹⁰*The LORD will be King forever. Jerusalem, your God is everlasting. Praise the LORD!*

Have you ever wondered about the word *forever*? Our understanding of time is limited. We see pictures of ourselves when we were born. We know our life began nine months before our birth. For us, that was the beginning of time. But forever is different. We cannot say time began on a certain date. There is a sign we use to show the word *forever*. The backs of both hands touch each other, while in a "Y" handshape, but then move apart. One hand moves forward (future) and the other hand moves toward the back (past). This sign is used to describe God's eternal reign.

The psalm ends with a summary of the previous verses. God is King above all people, things, and false gods. God has always been King and will always be King. Just as God will always be here with us, His plans will also always be here. God always **exists** and He will always be faithful in His love for us. What a good reason to praise the Lord!

KEY DOCTRINE: *God*

God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. To Him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience.

Can you think of a situation in which you followed your own plans but realized God had a better plan?

What should we do when this happens to us?

How does God defend the Deaf community from those who seem to oppress us?

How should the Deaf community respond to God?

IN MY CONTEXT

God is eternal. His thoughts are better than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9). His methods are better than our methods. God's eternal character means He knows and understands so much more than we do. Why do we rely on people instead of God?

In our churches, do we pray before we make decisions? When we pray, do we ask God to guide us to the best decision? Or do we ask Him to bless the decisions we already made? Do we ask Him to protect us from those who hate us? Or do we create plans to protect ourselves?

As long as we defend ourselves and rely on others for help, we will never see or understand God's eternal love and great mercy. We need to see and understand these things about God. That is the only way we can learn to praise Him for what He has done.

What is the key emphasis from Psalm 146?

If God defends the weak and powerless, why do so many poor, oppressed people still exist?

How do we balance using our minds to make good decisions with relying on God's wisdom to guide our choices?

MEMORY VERSE

"He made heaven and earth, the sea and everything in it. He remains loyal forever."

—Psalm 146:6



Session 10

THE CONFESSION

The realization of sin should encourage us to confess and repent of our sins.

PSALM 51:1-17

FIRST THOUGHTS

All people sin, including Christians. We fail to obey God's words, laws, and expectations. We make bad choices. We ignore what we know is true. Later we realize what we have done. When **conviction** hits us, what should we do? Should we ask others for advice? Go to church? Pray?

King David was a great man. The Bible called David a man after God's own heart. David expanded the kingdom of Israel, defeated his nation's enemies, and wrote songs for worship. Even so, David sinned. How could David be a man after God's own heart if he sinned?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

David committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Uriah was a soldier in David's army. David stole his wife and arranged for Uriah to die in battle. To understand David's sins, read about Bathsheba, Uriah, and the King in 2 Samuel 11.

In 2 Samuel 12, Nathan the prophet confronted David about his sin. David realized the depths of his sins. He begged God for mercy. In the days or months after realizing his sin, David wrote Psalm 51. We can begin to understand why the authors of the Bible called David a great man of God as we read David's feelings and emotions in Psalm 51.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Guilty as Charged (Psalm 51:1-5)

VERSES 1-2

¹*God, be merciful to me because You are loving. Because You are always ready to be merciful, wipe out all my wrongs.*

²*Wash away all my guilt and make me clean again.*

We have already studied the concept of *hesed*. This Hebrew word meant loving kindness. David appealed to God's loving (*hesed*) nature. David wanted God's love to drive Him to forgive David's sins. God's mercy comes out of God's love. David hoped God's mercy and love would be enough to forgive David's mistakes.

In verses 1b-2, David used three different verbs to ask God to clean him. Each word has a slightly different meaning. The word *wipe* means "to clean a slate or erase a legal record." David wanted the Lord to erase any record of David's sin just as a judge can erase a criminal record. The phrase "wash away" usually meant "to clean stained clothing." David's sin stained him completely. He wanted God to scrub the stain of sin from his soul. David asked God, "Make me clean." David formally presented himself to God as a sinner. He wanted to worship God again. David needed God to clean out the sins of his heart before he could worship.

David wanted his guilt removed and the stain of sin gone. David wanted to be clean again so he could worship God in His temple. David knew that he could not clean himself. The three different ways he asked God to clean him showed David depended on God for holiness and **restoration**.

VERSES 3-4

³*I know about my wrongs, and I can't forget my sin.*

⁴*You are the only one I have sinned against; I have done what You say is wrong. You are right when you speak and fair when You judge.*

David could not forget what he had done. If we read the story of David and Bathsheba we can easily see several sins David remembered. David lusted for Bathsheba. He committed adultery with her. David tried to trick Uriah into believing he was the father of Bathsheba's child. In the end, David arranged for Uriah to die in battle.

If David was like people are today, he probably obsessed over his guilt. Maybe he stayed up late at night, pacing the floor and staring out the window. Perhaps David stood near the temple and wondered if he would ever feel comfortable worshipping God again. David did not deny his sin. He admitted his sins and was heartbroken over them.

Whom did David sin against? Many people might say David's main **victim** was Uriah. David took Uriah's wife and arranged Uriah's death. Some would say David sinned against Bathsheba. David was the king. Perhaps Bathsheba felt she could not refuse an offer from King David. Also David's son died because of David's sin.

David could not hide his sin from his family. His actions became examples for his own children. Two of David's sons committed sexual sins, which caused sorrow for David and the nation. His son, Amnon, raped his half sister, Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1-14). Absalom had sexual relations with ten of David's concubines in the sight of all of Israel when he attempted to overtake the kingdom (2 Samuel 16:20-23).

David's sin hurt Uriah, Bathsheba and her son, his influence on his other sons, and even the nation. But David did not truly sin against them. Sin is the failure to obey God's laws. David sinned against God, and only God.

David admitted his sins (verse 1). He knew he sinned against God. David appealed to God's justice. He knew God's decision would be fair. Even if God punished David, David knew he could trust God's decisions.

VERSE 5.

⁵*I was brought into this world in sin. In sin my mother gave birth to me.*

David stated a fact. We are born as sinners. We live as sinners. Sin is a part of our character. We are unable to change it ourselves. If we are born sinners, what hope can we have for a holy life? How can we possibly approach God?

BIBLE SKILL: *Examining Parables*

In 2 Samuel 12, Nathan the prophet told King David a story to help him understand his own sin. Nathan perhaps knew David would not see his own sin clearly without some sort of story. Jesus used a similar method of teaching called parables. Jesus used examples from daily life to teach important spiritual ideas. Look at these other sections of the Bible and see how Jesus' parables are similar to Nathan's story.

Matthew 13:1-9 _____

Luke 15:11-32 _____

Luke 15:3-10 _____

How did David respond when confronted about his sins?

What does it mean to say that we really only sin against God, even if we hurt other people?

2. Plea for Cleansing (Psalm 51:6-13)

VERSES 6-7

⁶*You want me to be completely truthful, so teach me wisdom.*

⁷*Take away my sin, and I will be clean. Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.*

David admitted (verses 3-4) his sins against God. He also knew God was a fair judge who would decide how to punish David. David did not want to be punished. He wanted to be pure again.

God is our judge. He made the laws and rules of the universe and expects us to obey. Like a human judge, God decides if we are guilty or innocent. The Lord can punish us or forgive our sins completely. David wanted complete forgiveness. God's decision to completely wipe out our sins and restore us to a right relationship with Him is called *justification*. Romans 3:21-31 offers Paul's explanation of justification for the Christian.

KEY DOCTRINE: *Salvation*

Justification brings the believer into a relationship of peace and favor with God.

VERSES 8-12

⁸ *Make me hear sounds of joy and gladness; let the bones you crushed be happy again.*

⁹ *Turn your face from my sins and wipe out all my guilt.*

¹⁰ *Create in me a pure heart, God, and make my spirit right again.*

¹¹ *Do not send me away from You or take your Holy Spirit away from me.*

¹² *Give me back the joy of Your salvation. Keep me strong by giving me a willing spirit.*

Before David confessed his sins, he seemed to struggle with **conviction** and guilt (verse 3). He experienced a kind of inner anguish. God was a part of David's inner anguish. David knew God used inner pain and heartache to discipline him.

David wanted to experience joy again. He wanted to live a pure and holy life. Our relationship with God should be a joyful experience. David could not have a joyful, glad relationship with God with sin in his heart. David begged God to remove sin completely so their relationship could grow again.

Sin damaged David's relationship with God. His guilt created a distance between them. David begged for God to remain with him. David wanted to experience the joy of knowing God. He called this "the joy of Your salvation."

Do you remember when you became a Christian? Many people experienced amazing relief and joy during their first few months as a Christian. Their sins were gone. Christ filled their lives. What amazing joy! During the next few years and decades, though, that joy may have faded. They attended church, grew as Christians, and avoided sin. But they missed that joy from the past.

David wanted to experience the joy of God's presence and forgiveness again. David begged for God's Spirit to feed and support him, keeping him strong and obedient.

VERSE 13

¹³ *Then I will teach Your ways to those who do wrong, and sinners will turn back to You.*

David wanted the chance to teach others how to honor God. David desired a right relationship with God so he could tell people how to obey the Lord. David wanted everyone to have the same purity and joy he had in his walk with God.

What are the symptoms that a person's relationship with God is broken?

What words of hope can you offer someone who has a broken relationship with God?

3. Deliverance Through Heartbreak (Psalm 51:14-17)

VERSES 14-17

¹⁴ God, save me from the guilt of murder, God of my salvation, and I will sing about Your goodness.

¹⁵ LORD, let me speak so I may praise You.

¹⁶ You are not pleased by sacrifices, or I would give them. You don't want burnt offerings.

¹⁷ The sacrifice God wants is a broken spirit. God, you will not reject a heart that is broken and sorry for sin.

What could David give God to earn forgiveness for murder and adultery? The Israelites followed the Mosaic Laws and offered sacrifices for their sins. In verse 16 David rejected the idea of offering a sacrifice. God's laws required sacrifices so why would Israel's king say God did not want burnt offerings?

God wanted His people to offer sacrifices as a result of their sorrowful hearts. He required sacrifices of bulls and sheep as a form of worship. But the most important part of the ceremony was the sinner's sorrow. Many years after David died, the prophet Malachi recorded God's feelings about sacrifices without sorrow (Malachi 1). God begged the people to close the temple doors and stop their sacrifices. The Israelites did not worship God from their hearts, so God did not want their sacrifices.

The system of sacrifice was not perfect. The bulls and sheep were not perfect. Sacrifices had to be repeated regularly for forgiveness of past sins.

The Mosaic system of sacrifice was only a reflection of the true sacrifice that provides forgiveness of past, present, and future sins. The death and resurrection of Jesus, the perfect lamb, is the only true sacrifice. We can receive forgiveness for our sins when we approach God in repentance and brokenness through Jesus.

In these verses we can see why David was a true man of God. David sinned terribly, but he turned to God with a broken heart. David had faith in God's plan for forgiveness. David understood the true meaning of repentance and turned to God in sorrow. Oh, that we would do the same!

Why did David say God did not want burnt offerings?

What does it mean to be a person after God's own heart?

How can we become someone after God's own heart like David?

Write any notes or questions that came to your mind to discuss with your group.

IN MY CONTEXT

We all sin. When we realize we have sinned, we look to God for forgiveness. When we turn to God in sorrow for our sins, God will forgive. God forgives us when we believe in Christ and His sacrifice for us. Jesus holds the key to our forgiveness and a healed relationship with God.

Even after we are saved, baptized, and join a church, we will sometimes sin. Sin distracts us, and we turn away from God. What do we do? Where can we go with our shame and our guilt? Can we truly turn back to God after we reject His commands?

Yes. As David proved, we can return to God with sorrow over our sins. God hates our sins, but He wants us to return to Him. If we turn to God with sorrow and a desire to unite with Him again, He will always forgive us.

How are we affected by the weight of sin?

Why is sorrow for our sins so important?

How can we be certain God forgives our sins when we repent?

MEMORY VERSE

“Create in me a pure heart, God, and make my spirit right again”

—Psalm 51:10



Session 11

THE CLEANSING

God's complete forgiveness of those who turn to Him in faith produces **gratitude**.

PSALM 32:1-11

FIRST THOUGHTS

When Christians sin, what should they do? The easy answer is, "Confess and repent." We know God expects us to be holy. We know sin is unholy. We know we must pray to God and work through our sins with Him. Many Christians seem to resist this idea. Why?

Shame often causes us to avoid God. We are embarrassed about our sins. We do not want to admit them. Perhaps we are afraid of what God will say. Sometimes we avoid confession because we enjoy our sins. We make up reasons why our sin is not so bad. We say, "I know I gossip, but that's just Deaf culture."

David knew about sinning. He also knew about refusing to confess. David wrote Psalm 32 after God forgave him for adultery and murder. David shared his experiences with the people of Israel and with us. What can we learn about confession, repentance, and God's grace?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Last week we studied Psalm 51. Psalm 32 is probably a companion to Psalm 51. Psalm 51 expressed David's prayer for forgiveness and **restoration**. Psalm 32 continues the theme, highlighting God's willingness to forgive and the lessons David learned.

As you read you'll notice the word *Selah*. This Hebrew word appears 71 times in the Book of Psalms. We do not have a clear meaning for this word in English. Many Bible teachers believe the word shows a break or pause in the music. The psalms were mostly songs or hymns. We should expect some musical instructions. As we study Psalm 32, do not be distracted when you see *Selah*.

King David describes two different kinds of people. In verses one and two, David talks about people who are happy. Some Bible translations use the word *blessed* instead of happy. In verses 3-4, David will describe someone who is unhappy. David draws from his own experiences to describe the heartache of guilt. From verse 5 to the end of the chapter, David applies the lessons he learned to all people. He calls them to return to God in confession of their sin.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. The Contrast (Psalm 32:1-4)

VERSES 1-2

¹*Happy is the person whose sins are forgiven, whose wrongs are pardoned.*

²*Happy is the person whom the LORD does not consider guilty and in whom there is nothing false.*

Verses 1-2 introduce Psalm 32. David described a happy, or blessed, person. A happy person is someone whose sins are gone. God removed their sins forever. In Psalm 51, David begged for God's forgiveness. Now we see what David learned from his sin and confession. God used David's experience with sin to teach him an important lesson. Being innocent of sin is true happiness.

David used some specific words and phrases to show different ways to understand the things we do. He mentioned sins and forgiveness. Sins are mistakes we make against God's commands or will. As Paul wrote in Romans 3:23, all people sin and fail to meet God's high standards. All people sin. Anyone who believes he does not need God's forgiveness is lying to himself (1 John 1:8-10).

David also said God would pardon the wrong acts people do. The word *pardon* is a legal word meaning "set aside or forgive a **violation** of law."

The idea of a courtroom trial is in the Old Testament (Jeremiah 2:31-37, Micah 6:1-2). God decided to judge the people of Israel for their repeated sins. God gave laws to the people of Israel, of course, but David probably used the legal terms here in a more general way. God, as ruler and creator, established laws for all people to follow. When people fail to follow those laws, God must judge them.

What does it mean for God to consider us not guilty of sins or crimes against Him? God, in His mercy and grace, decides to remove our sins and views us as holy and pure. In Christian theology, we call this purifying act justification. Justification is a one-time act of God. He declares us free from sin and holy.

VERSES 3-4

³*When I kept things to myself, I felt weak deep inside me. I moaned all day long.*

⁴*Day and night You punished me. My strength was gone as in the summer heat. Selah*

First David introduced us to the idea of happy people and God's forgiveness. Next David looked back to a time when his sins were not yet forgiven. In the story of David's sins in 2 Samuel 11-12, many months passed between the sin and the confession. Second Samuel does not record David's thoughts during those months, but we see in Psalm 32 how David felt. David knew he sinned, even if he did not want to admit it. David was unhappy all the time. He lacked inner strength.

We know God punished David for his sins. David and Bathsheba had a son who died because of David's sin. David is not writing about that punishment in Psalm 32. Remember, David's psalm is about God's forgiveness. It seems David's song is about those long months between his sin and his confession. God punished David through inner torment or unrest in some way.

Even though David was God's child—devout, worshipful, usually obedient—God still punished him for sinning. Christians often believe punishment for sins is something that happens to sinners. God may punish them through difficult circumstances. As Christians, we fool ourselves into believing our salvation means no punishment for sin. As David's life shows, God still punishes His children when they sin.

KEY DOCTRINE: *God's Purpose of Grace*

Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves.

What impact does unconfessed sin have on us?

If God loves us, why does He punish us sometimes for our sins?

Why not just forgive us without punishment or discipline?

2. The Decision (Psalm 32:5)

VERSE 5

⁵*Then I confessed my sins to You and didn't hide my guilt. I said, "I will confess my sins to the LORD," and You forgave my guilt. Selah*

Confession means "to agree with the Lord that you have done moral wrong and deserve punishment." We can list our sins for God, but true confession is more than a list. We must agree with Him that our actions are evil and are against His moral law.

True confession comes from the heart and includes repentance. Repentance is turning away from your sin completely. Confession is the first step towards forgiveness. Repentance is the second step. Some people confess their sins by admitting they made mistakes, but they fail to turn from their sins (fail to repent). This is not true confession.

When David confessed and repented, he found rest. Living in sin led David to a lack of peace and spiritual comfort. A true child of God cannot continue sinning and simply ignore the Spirit's **conviction**. When Christians sin, their hearts and minds are uncomfortable. Like David, we sometimes resist confession. We do not want to face our sins. But confession and repentance are the only ways we can return to our relationship with God.

What might be reasons Christians would avoid confessing their sins to God?

What are the benefits of confessing our sins?

3. The Counsel (Psalm 32:6-9)

VERSES 6-7

⁶*For this reason, all who obey You should pray to You while they still can. When troubles rise like a flood, they will not reach them.*

⁷*You are my hiding place. You protect me from my troubles and fill me with songs of salvation. Selah*

David started verse six by saying, "For this reason..." What reason was David talking about? David just told the people how confession and repentance led to God's forgiveness. Based on that experience ("For this reason..."), David advised the people to pray to God while they still could.

David presented a radical idea here. God might not always be accessible to sinners. David wanted people to turn to God before time ran out. Maybe David thought God might kill people for their repeated sins. Maybe he thought God would stop listening to their prayers if they did not repent.

During the time of Moses, Pharaoh refused to listen to God. Exodus chapters 7–9 contain the phrase, "Pharaoh hardened his heart (became stubborn)." In chapter 10, the phrase changed: "God hardened Pharaoh's heart..." God only tolerated a certain amount of stubborn disobedience from the Egyptian king. When time ran out, God made sure the king was too stubborn to obey. As David might say, Pharaoh did not pray to God while he still could.

VERSES 8-9

⁸*The LORD says, “I will make you wise and show you where to go. I will guide you and watch over you.*

⁹*So don’t be like a horse or donkey, that doesn’t understand. They must be led with bits and reins, or they will not come near you.”*

How would God respond to confession and repentance? David said God would make people wise. He would show them the right path through life. The right path (“...show you where to go...”) would help people avoid future sins. God wants us to remain holy just as He is holy (1 Peter 1:15).

God’s guidance comes to us through the Bible and through the Spirit’s nudging. Commands are also part of God’s guidance for us. God has the right to command because He has authority over everything. We are uncomfortable with authority because we imagine control and power. Godly authority establishes limits for the benefit of both the individual and the community. Authority is a protective wall, or a fence along a lane keeping us within the moral boundaries. God established boundaries to help guide us.

David begged the people to submit willingly to God’s authority. He advised others to not be stubborn or unwise like the horse or donkey who has to be controlled. He encouraged people to confess their sins. David counseled people from his own experience. He had sinned and stubbornly tried to hide his sin. But he learned an important lesson from his experience. He wanted everyone to avoid making the same mistake he had made.

In verse 6, David said problems would not reach those who confessed their sins to God. Did David mean we would have no problems at all?

How can you help others by sharing your own experiences of confessing your sins?

4. The Conclusion (Psalm 32:10-11)

VERSE 10-11

¹⁰*Wicked people have many troubles, but the LORD’S love surrounds those who trust him.*

¹¹*Good people, rejoice and be happy in the LORD. Sing all you whose hearts are right.*

Remember verses 1-2 form an introduction to Psalm 32. David wrote about blessed people. They were people who received God’s forgiveness for their

sins. God viewed those people as holy and clean. In the last two verses of the chapter, David closed by contrasting wicked people with the good people from verses 1-2.

Wicked people sinned without confession or repentance. They sinned without caring about God’s moral laws. David said these people would suffer in some way. Good people—people who trust God—will have God’s love poured out on them. They would have many reasons to be joyful, praising God through song and action. Their holiness (“...all you whose hearts are right...”) should inspire them to praise God for His wonderful love and mercy.

BIBLE SKILL: *Character Study*

The Bible provides many examples of people who were stubborn and would not confess their sins (wicked) and those who confessed their sins and repented (good). Review the following passages and identify if the person was wicked or good, and what happened to them.

Genesis 4:6-16 _____

Numbers 12:1-15 _____

1 Samuel 7:2-11 _____

Jonah 3:1-10 _____

Luke 24:40-43 _____

Acts 5:1-10 _____

What troubles might the people who refuse to confess their sins experience?

Give some examples of how the “Lord’s love surrounds” those who trust Him.

IN MY CONTEXT

As you consider David's sins and the lessons he learned, how do these things fit into your life? David resisted confession and repentance for months, and he suffered the entire time. Can you remember times in your life when you refused to admit your sins to God and suffered in some way? Do you have sins that you can confess but cannot leave behind (repent)? How can you take that next step and repent of your sins?

Even though David confessed his sin and repented, he still experienced reminders of his sin. There was death in his family and Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, died. Though God forgives the person who confesses and repents, it is sometimes hard to get beyond the reminders of our sin. Believing God forgives requires an act of faith.

What words would you use to describe a person who has sinned and is unwilling to confess and repent?

What words would you use to describe a person who has confessed and repented of their sin?

What advice can we give someone who has confessed his or her sin and repented, but cannot move beyond the reminders of his or her sin?

MEMORY VERSE

"Good people, rejoice and be happy in the LORD. Sing all you whose hearts are right."

—Psalm 32:11



Session 12

THE PROTECTOR

Believers should seek refuge in God, because He is the only One who can give them strength to face temptation and evil.

PSALM 141:1-10

FIRST THOUGHTS

How do we resist sin? Sometimes Christians believe they can use their own strength to fight off the desire to sin. Too often, we fail. We sin again and again. We are confused about why we cannot resist temptation.

David's prayer in Psalm 141 paints a picture of how he avoided sin. David called on God to save him. Just as we ask God to forgive us after we sin, we should spend time begging the Lord for help before we sin.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Most Bible teachers believe David wrote this Psalm. This was an evening prayer asking for sanctification and protection from temptation. As we read the psalm, we can easily see statements that might relate to events in David's life. We will examine those statements during the lesson.

Jewish law did not require the people to pray three times daily. But we can see a pattern of praying three times a day in the Old Testament. In Psalm 55:17 the writer said he prayed in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. Many years after David's death, Daniel prayed three times every day. Psalm 141 was probably a poem or song used as an evening prayer.

Verses 1-2 call to God for attention. In verses 3-7 David begged for help with sin and temptation. The last section, verses 8-10, addresses salvation from enemies.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. The Plea (Psalm 141:1-2)

VERSES 1-2

¹*LORD, I call to You. Come quickly. Listen to me when I call to You.*

²*Let my prayer be like incense placed before You, and my praise like the evening sacrifice.*

Psalm 141 is a prayer from David asking God for protection from temptation. Before he prayed, David called to God. He asked for God's attention. In verse 1, the psalmist begs God to answer ("come") quickly and to listen to his words. This verse reminds me of some Deaf people I have seen pray at Deaf conferences. They will lift their faces upward. Maybe their eyes are open or maybe they are closed. Then they lift one arm and wave their hand, like they are waving to get God's attention. Waving is the Deaf way to get someone's attention. Why not wave to get God's attention, too? God knows when we pray. God listened to David's prayer. David's words and our waving to get God's attention show that we are focused on God and believe that He will hear our prayers.

Verse 2 mentions two parts of worship for the Israelites. The first part of worship was incense. The priests mixed the proper ingredients for the incense. The recipe for the incense was only for worship. The priests burned incense daily as an act of worship and an act of obedience to God's commands. The second part of worship in verse 2 is the evening sacrifice. God commanded the priests to offer many different sacrifices, including a lamb every morning and every evening (Exodus 29:38-41).

When David offered his prayers, he was asking for God's help. David also believed his prayers were a way to obey and worship, just like the special incense the priests used. David's praise was like the sacrifices the people offered to God in the evening. David wanted to praise God through the attitude and act of prayer. The act of praying meant David saw God as holy and worthy of his prayers.

David talked to God with confidence. David had confidence because he knew God forgave his sins. God restored David to a right relationship with Him. That relationship gave David the right to ask God to answer his prayers. The writer of the Book of Hebrews felt the same way. In Hebrews 4:16, the writer said we can “feel very sure that we can come before God’s throne.” Other translations say we can approach God boldly or with confidence. David knew God sat on His throne, but he also had a proper relationship with a holy God. That relationship gave David the right to enter with confidence the throne room of God in prayer.

BIBLE SKILL: *Understanding Confidence*

The word “confidence” is an interesting word. The New Century Version (NCV) of the Bible uses “feel certain,” “feel very sure,” and “without fear” for the word “confidence.” We usually use the sign for “trust” to show confidence. Often you see people signing “self trust,” which means self-confidence. We can approach God’s throne with confidence, but not with self-confidence. Read the following verses and write who makes it possible for us to approach God with confidence (without fear or with certainty):

2 Corinthians 3:4 _____

Hebrews 4:14-16 _____

Ephesians 3:12 _____

Hebrews 10:19 _____

What gives a person confidence and freedom to approach God in prayer?

How was David’s prayer similar to worship?

How do we change our own prayers to be an act of worship?

2. The Requests (Psalm 141:3-7)

VERSES 3-4

³ *LORD, help me control my tongue; help me be careful about what I say.*

⁴ *Take away my desire to do evil or to join others in doing wrong. Don't let me eat tasty food with those who do evil.*

David began his prayer by asking for God's help. David, like all of us, suffered from temptation. David asked God to help him resist the desire to sin in some very specific ways.

David first asked for help controlling what he said ("help me control my **tongue**"). David was the king. His words were important and people listened to him.

Second, David asked for help to avoid the temptation to do evil and to avoid joining others as they do evil things. The Bible records many acts David committed or almost committed. He almost murdered a selfish landowner (1 Samuel 25). He could have killed King Saul twice (1 Samuel 24 and 1 Samuel 26). David murdered Uriah and stole his wife (2 Samuel 11). David wanted God to protect him from using poor judgment. He wanted to make good decisions.

David did not want to enjoy the sinful pleasures of the world with evil people. Some people interpret verse 4 to mean David did not want to enjoy spending time with evil people. David wanted to avoid people who would tempt him to sin.

Something interesting to notice in this section is David did not ask God to remove temptation. He wanted strength to resist temptation. Also, in verse 3 David showed he was responsible for his own words and actions. We all experience temptation. Like David, we are all responsible for whatever we say or do.

VERSES 5-7

⁵ *If a good person punished me, that would be kind. If he corrected me, that would be like perfumed oil on my head. I shouldn't refuse it. But I pray against those who do evil.*

⁶ *Let their leaders be thrown down the cliffs. Then people will know that I have spoken correctly:*

⁷ *"The ground is plowed and broken up. In the same way, our bones have been scattered at the grave."*

As you read verse 5, ask yourself why David welcomed punishment from a good person? How can correction be a good thing? David believed he could not possibly know all the right ways to behave. David asked God to give him righteous people to provide **accountability**.

When David sinned with Bathsheba, Nathan the prophet rebuked David for his sin. When David was ready to kill Nabal, Abigail warned David not to do it. Like everyone, David needed someone to warn him about his sins. The king wanted an advisor who could scold him for his wrongs. Today, we call this idea accountability.

Proverbs mentions this idea. Wise people accept correct criticism (Proverbs 9:8). People who accept correction will receive honor (Proverbs 13:18). Harsh words from a friend help us grow (Proverbs 27:6). When we encounter people who challenge us and push us to grow spiritually, we grow (Proverbs 27:17). People today would not easily accept the idea of a friend who rebukes, but in reality it is a wonderful thing.

David prayed for the destruction of the wicked. David was not simply asking God to punish his enemies. When the Bible uses the word *wicked*, it means “someone who does evil, sinful things.” A wicked person does not love God or God’s Word. We need to be careful not to use David’s prayer against evil people as an excuse to pray against our brothers and sisters in Christ.

KEY DOCTRINE: Accountability

Most people would not think of accountability as a biblical concept, but the idea exists in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Accountability can be described as “responsibility.” Ezekiel 3, 33, and 34 make a strong statement about accountability. The Book of Psalms and the Book of Proverbs have many references to accepting advice and even rebuke from wiser people. Paul encouraged older believers to advise and rebuke less experienced Christians. The Bible provides examples of how believers can lovingly help one another avoid sin and maintain proper relationships with other Christians and with God. Look up the word “accountability” in a Bible concordance to find other examples.

Some people ask trusted Christian friends to be their “accountability partner.” What characteristics would you look for in an “accountability partner”?

What would be the best way to talk with a Christian friend about his or her sin?

3. The Promise (Psalm 141:8-10)

VERSE 3

³ *God, I look to You for help. I trust in You, LORD. Don't let me die. Protect me from the traps they set for me and from the net that evil people have spread. Let the wicked fall into their own nets, but let me pass by safely.*

In the middle of temptation and enemies, David turned to God for help. When we remember David's dependence on God, what can we conclude about David's view of God? David trusted Him. David had no doubts about God's ability to help him.

Often, we talk in our churches about “relying on God.” Do we truly depend on Him? Do we pray for a solution, and then try to solve the problem ourselves? David not only said he relied on God, David truly depended on Him. David's **reliance** on God shows David's faithfulness to Him. Do you view your dependence on God as proof of your faithfulness to Him?

You may have watched movies where the enemy digs a hole and covers it with sticks and leaves to make it look like the ground. It is hard for someone walking by to notice that it is a trap. Without realizing it, a person steps into the pit and is unable to climb out before the enemy arrives. Another common trap used in battle is to bury explosives in the ground. Many American soldiers have lost their lives or suffered loss of their legs, arms, or vision because they accidentally stepped on the hidden explosives. The hidden traps can also be dangerous for the enemy. They may forget where they dug the pit or buried the explosive.

Traps are not limited to pits and explosives. Sometimes enemies trick us with words, or traps that cause us to sin. People may lie to us or only tell us part of the truth to convince us to join some sinful activity. Children will

believe their friends and do what they ask. But when they are caught doing a bad thing, the friends do not support them. They leave the one person to be punished. David trusted God to show him the right path to walk that would keep him safe from the hidden traps. Even if he could not see the dangers with his eyes, he trusted God to help lead him away from the traps.

Once again, David compares the fate of the wicked versus that of the righteous. David wanted evil people to trap themselves in their words and actions while he escaped unharmed. How could David call other people evil when he himself had sinned so terribly? The difference between David as a sinner and wicked people was David's repentance. David always returned to the Lord in sorrow and shame. David wrote, "Create in me a pure heart, God, and make my spirit right again. Do not send me away from you or take your Holy Spirit away from me" (Psalm 51:10-12). Wicked people are those who sin without sorrow. They care nothing about a relationship with God.

Do Christians today accept correction from other Christians? Why or why not?

Which of David's actions should a believer follow today? Why?

IN MY CONTEXT

Too many times we try to fix the problem of sin after we have already made our mistakes. We pray, “God forgive me!” We need to pray for forgiveness. It is also important to walk away from sin (repent) and find ways to avoid sinning again. David prayed for God to save him from sinning again in the future. Do we pray that prayer? Do we ask God to rebuke us, and to send someone to help us obey God?

The church is the body of believers. Not only are we brothers and sisters in Christ, but we are also co-laborers for God’s Kingdom. When a believer sins, that sin hurts the whole church. The Holy Spirit helps believers hold one another accountable for God’s glory.

How does accountability help us avoid sin?

What accountability supports are offered in your church?

Do you have someone to help you avoid sin by warning you about negative thoughts and attitudes?

If not, pray and ask God to help you find someone to help you.

MEMORY VERSE

“God, I look to you for help. I trust in you, LORD. Don’t let me die.”

—Psalm 141:8



Session 13

THE LONGING

The hope of God's presence serves as encouragement during discouraging times.

PSALM 42:1-11

FIRST THOUGHTS

Depression is a topic many people do not discuss in church. Some people do not want to admit they struggle with depression. Some are embarrassed to rely on medicine or counseling. Some Christians even believe depression is a sign of sin or **evidence** of a failure to rely on God.

Despair, discouragement, and even depression are in the Bible. We can see how Christ despaired on the cross, how Jonah became angry, and how Job wanted to die. Despair and depression are part of the human experience for many people. How should we respond to such a difficult problem?

The sons of Korah seemed to experience all these emotions. Psalm 42 is a cry for help from a broken heart. As we study this psalm, remember this is a **complex** issue. No one has an easy answer for the problem.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The sons of Korah wrote Psalms 42 and 43. We learned about the sons of Korah in session 5 when we studied Psalm 84. You can review the Understanding the Context section of that lesson if you need help remembering. Psalms 42 and 43 were probably songs for the people to sing together, perhaps during difficult times.

Psalms 42 and 43 were probably one long psalm. We can study these two psalms and see how they are similar. The psalms have a chorus (also called a refrain) repeated three times in these two chapters: 42:5; 42:11; and 43:5. This chorus is exactly the same in each verse. From this evidence, we can see how Psalms 42 and 43 were probably one long psalm originally.

EXPLORE THE TEXT (PSALM 42)

1. Thirsty (Psalm 42:1-4)

VERSES 1-2

¹*As a deer thirsts for streams of water, so I thirst for you, God.*

²*I thirst for the living God. When can I go to meet with Him?*

All living creatures need water. Animals can live a long time without food, but without water they die very quickly. When animals are very thirsty, they search for water. They work hard to find the water they so desperately need. Deer do not only want water; they need water to live.

Imagine a deer, like we read about in verse 1. The deer eats grass and travels with his herd of other deer. The grass is dry and the ponds are empty. Eventually the deer's body begins to dry out. Gradually, the dryness of the deer's body makes him thirsty. Where can he find water? For a little while, his thirst is minor. He wants water. Later, the deer becomes desperate. Now he needs water—badly. Where will he find water? Will he live long enough to satisfy his need?

The writer of Psalm 42 felt like a thirsty deer. Unlike the deer, the psalmist did not need water. He needed the presence of God.

What do we mean when we talk about spiritual dryness and spiritual thirst? Spiritual dryness is often a lack of involvement in godly and church matters. Perhaps we have a hard time praying. The Bible does not interest us. We live day by day as good people without really acting like holy people. God seems far away from us, and we struggle through life without His presence.

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The writer of Psalm 42 was spiritually dry. He was thirsty for God. Just as a deer needs water, followers of God need Him. The only way to overcome our spiritual dryness is to drink deeply of God. The writer had access to the Law of Moses and the temple. Worship songs were available. Priests could offer sacrifices. Even so, the psalmist asked, “When can I go to meet with Him (God)?” His own dryness prevented him from knowing how to find God in order to satisfy his thirst.

VERSES 3-4

³*Day and night, my tears have been my food. People are always saying, “Where is your God?”*

⁴*When I remember these things, I speak with a broken heart. I used to walk with the crowd and lead them to God’s Temple with songs of praise.*

In verses 3-4 we can see the emotional impact of being spiritually dry. The writer cried day and night. He probably could not sleep. People challenged his belief in God, saying, “Where is your God?” Of course, God was always present, but our writer seemed far from Him. How could God be present but seem far away?

When we are sad, discouraged, or depressed, we often think and feel in ways that seem odd. For example, we know our families love us, but we feel unloved. We know we have friends, but we feel lonely. The writer of Psalm 42 faced the same problem. The psalmist knew God was real, but God seemed too far away. Talking about God’s presence and absence broke his heart (verse 4).

To make the situation worse, the writer missed being a part of worship. He used to lead the people to God’s temple for worship. They would sing wonderful songs together, joyfully praising God. He missed being a part of that special time of praise and worship, being a part of a great fellowship of believers.

BIBLE SKILL: *Find the Emotion*

People have emotions. God made us with the ability to feel things in our hearts and our minds. Many times we feel happiness and joy. At other times we are angry or sad. Emotional pain, or anguish, also comes up. The people in the Bible were just like you and me. They had success and failure. They suffered from emotional and mental pain.

Look at the passages carefully. What emotions are people feeling in these stories? Do they hurt? What is God's response to them?

Genesis 21:14-19 _____

Exodus 12:29-36 _____

1 Samuel 1:1-19 _____

1 Samuel 18:5-11 _____

2 Kings 20:1-11 _____

Jonah 4 _____

Luke 22:39-44 _____

Why was the writer of Psalm 42 sad?

Where was God while the writer suffered?

How can we worship God while suffering from sadness and depression?

2. Drowning (Psalm 42:5-8)

VERSES 5-6

⁵*Why am I so sad? Why am I so upset? I should put my hope in God and keep praising Him, my Savior and*

⁶*my God. I am very sad. So I remember You where the Jordan River begins, near the peaks of Hermon and Mount Mizar.*

The writer of Psalm 42 speaks for many people when he asks, “Why am I so sad? Why am I so upset?” Depression and discouragement often surprise us. We have good lives and excellent jobs. Our families love us. We can be wealthy, healthy Christians and still suffer from despair.

What should we do? Depression is a very **complex** issue, and many different solutions can help. Christian counseling helps some people. Other people use medicine to help overcome the worst of their depression. Family relationships can help, of course, by offering support. However we address the issue of depression, we need to remember something important—our need for God continues.

The psalmist was likely exhausted. He was constantly sad and heartbroken. He knew what he needed to do. He needed to put his hope in God and continue praising Him.

Verse 5 is a chorus in the middle of the song. Verse 11 is exactly the same. We can see the exact same phrase in Psalm 43:5. These are choruses, just like we have in our songs today.

VERSES 7-8

⁷*Troubles have come again and again, sounding like waterfalls. Your waves are crashing all around me.*

⁸*The LORD shows His true love every day. At night I have a song, and I pray to my living God.*

You may remember news reports in December, 2004, of the tsunami that hit Indonesia and many neighboring countries. An estimated 230,000 people were reported dead, many of whom were caught in waves and carried out to sea. The psalmist looked at the overwhelming nature of life and compared it to being swept underwater in a tsunami.

Troubles and trials keep us awake at night. We cry and worry. We hunger for God, but He seems so far away. We feel pushed around like an animal caught in waves and floods. Even during the storm, the writer committed himself to God. God is always present, even in hard times. Our response to the flood of troubles in our lives should be to acknowledge the love and

presence of God. We should try to respond like the psalmist responded—with a song and a prayer.

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Holy Spirit*

The Holy Spirit cultivates Christian character, comforts believers, and bestows the spiritual gifts by which they serve God through His church.

3. Crushed (Psalm 42:9-11)

VERSES 9-11

⁹*I say to God, my Rock, “Why have you forgotten me? Why am I sad and troubled by my enemies?”*

¹⁰*My enemies’ insults make me feel as if my bones were broken. They are always saying, “Where is your God?”*

¹¹*Why am I so sad? Why am I so upset? I should put my hope in God and keep praising him, my Savior and my God.*

The singer continued to mourn his heartbreak and sadness. He felt far from God and did not know how to solve the problem. Finally, in verse 9, he seemed to find part of the problem. He felt God had left him.

The Bible has many examples of people who suffered. Christ suffered on the cross. As He was dying, Jesus said something very similar to these verses, “My God, why have you forsaken me?” Jesus was quoting from Psalm 22:1, a psalm David wrote when he felt lonely and abandoned. Jesus was not separated from God. Separation would mean the Trinity stopped existing for a moment. More than likely, when God decided not to save Jesus from suffering and death, Jesus felt abandoned. God was present but did not act to save Christ from His fate.

Paul also suffered. In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 we can read about a medical issue Paul suffered. Paul had a medical problem God refused to heal. God told Paul that his weakness gave God the opportunity to show His perfect strength. God refused to solve the problem, but remained close to Paul to give him support.

Some suffering is physical, like illness. Other people suffer financially, like Job who lost everything. Some people endure emotional pain, like Hannah who prayed in the tabernacle for a son. Psalm 42 shows us a picture of someone who suffered physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The writer was spiritually dry and thirsty. He craved God’s presence, but he could not

seem to find God anywhere. He felt abandoned in his suffering and pain.

Christ suffered to bring salvation to the world. Paul suffered so God's strength would be obvious to him. Hannah, Sarah, and Rebekah suffered from infertility, giving God an opportunity to show His power. Why is the psalmist suffering? We do not know, but we see his pain and anguish in the words of the psalm.

How does the writer respond? Verse 11 records the chorus of the song once again: put your hope in God and praise Him. He is our Savior and God. Even as he suffered and felt alone, the writer knew God existed. God deserves our praise and trust, even as we suffer and hurt. As Job said, "Even if God kills me, I have hope in Him" (Job 13:15).

How is it possible to suffer and still know God loves you?

What types of situations cause physical and emotional pain?

When we face difficulties and uncertainties, what helps us to praise God?

IN MY CONTEXT

Everyone suffers. We may suffer physically, spiritually, emotionally, or all together at the same time. While we should always try to find the cause of our pain, we have a responsibility to continue living in ways that honor God.

Can we read our Bibles while depressed? Can we still pray and sing and discuss His word? Yes, we can. It's not easy, but we can. We might not have much to say, but we can still live in ways that honor and obey Him. Remember, we are not alone in our experiences. God is with us, even if we cannot see Him. He has helped people overcome their pain for their benefit and His glory.

Have you ever felt God was far away from you? How did you react to that feeling?

How can we have joy while also suffering?

What message of hope can we share with others who are struggling with personal, emotional, physical, and spiritual difficulties?

MEMORY VERSE

“The LORD shows His true love every day. At night I have a song, and I pray to my living God.”

—Psalm 42:8

Types of Psalms

There are 150 different psalms included in the Book of Psalms. It is not easy to put every psalm into a group or category. Sometimes a psalm may seem appropriate for several different categories.

For the reader of the psalms, it helps to understand what was happening during the time the psalm was written. The Book of Psalms is considered to be poetry. There are some different techniques used in American Sign Language poetry. One technique is called ABC storytelling, where the signer tells a story using handshapes starting with “A” and ending the story with “Z.” In a similar way, a few psalms are arranged using the Hebrew alphabet (Psalms 25; 34; 37; 111; 112; 119; 145) possibly to help the singers memorize the psalm.

For this personal study guide, the psalms are grouped into the following categories: hymns, laments, songs of thanksgiving, royal psalms, enthronement psalms, penitential psalms, and wisdom or didactic psalms.

Lament

- Laments are prayers or cries to God during times of trouble.
 - Community laments call to God during trouble against the nation, such as from enemies (Psalms 44; 74; 79).
 - Individual laments may be cries to God during illness (Psalms 22; 39; 41; 54).
 - Laments follow this basic pattern: call to God, description of the trouble, remembering when God saved in the past, request, God’s response, and a promise of praise.

Psalms 3–5; 7; 12–13; 17; 22; 25–27; 35; 39–44; 54–60; 62; 64; 69–71; 74; 77; 79–80; 83; 85–86; 88; 90; 94; 120; 123; 126; 134; 137; 140–142; 144

Thanksgiving

- The joyful response to God’s answers to prayers.
 - Related to the final promise of praise in the psalms of lament.
 - Spoken by the community (Psalms 106; 124; 129).
 - Spoken by the individual (Psalms 9; 30).

Psalms 9–11; 16; 23; 30–31; 34; 48; 62; 66–68; 75; 91–92; 106–109; 115–116; 118; 121; 124–125; 129; 131; 138–139

Hymn

- • Similar to songs of praise used in our worship today.
 - Hymn psalms can be sung with a leader and congregation taking turns.
 - Some have repeating phrases (Psalms 8; 136).
 - Hymn psalms usually have a call to praise followed by the reason to praise God.

Psalms 8; 15; 19; 24; 29; 33; 46; 52; 65; 81–82; 87; 100; 103–105; 111; 113–114, 117; 122; 135–136; 145–150

Royal

- • Royal psalms are about the earthly king of Israel.
 - They celebrate the king's rule.
 - They may have included a message or words from the king.
 - Some of the royal psalms are prayers for the king (Psalm 72).
 - Some royal psalms refer to the Messiah (Psalms 2; 89; 110).

Psalms 2; 18; 20–21; 45; 50; 61; 63; 72; 84; 89; 101; 110; 132

Enthronement

- • Psalms that celebrate God's kingship.
 - They celebrate God as king over all creation.

Psalms 47; 93–99

Penitential

- • Psalms that show remorse for sin.
 - They demonstrate repentance.
 - The psalmist asks for a right relationship with God.

Psalms 6; 28; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143

Wisdom / Didactic

- • Compares the ways the godly person and the evil person live (Psalm 1).
 - Celebrates God's Word (Psalm 119).
 - Discusses questions about God's holiness and justice and the presence of evil (Psalm 73).

Psalms 1; 14; 36–37; 49; 53; 73; 76; 78; 112; 119; 127–128; 133

WORD LIST

As you read the personal study guide, you see words in bold print. Following is a list of those words and what they mean.

Accountability—To accept responsibility for actions.

Apathetic—An attitude of not caring about something at all.

Banned —To forbid someone from participating in an activity.

Bestow—To give something as a gift.

Canaan—The name of the territory God gave the people of Israel to set up their country.

Charged—Accused of doing something wrong.

Complex—The grounds or courts around the temple (Session 5). Complicated, hard to understand (Session 13).

Contentment—Feeling satisfied, not needing something more.

Contrast / Contrasted—To study two things and show how they are different from each other.

Consigned—Send a person to an unpleasant place (hell).

Consistent—Faithful and dependable.

Conviction—An internal understanding of your own sin, caused by the inner working of the Holy Spirit.

Cultivates—To prepare the way for growth.

Cycle—A set of actions that keep repeating themselves in the same order.

Dedication—This has two meanings. The first meaning is to commit yourself to something (Olympic athletes dedicate themselves to practice). The second meaning is to give something for a specific purpose (Solomon dedicated the temple to God.)

Energize—To give energy to, to excite.

Enthronement—The idea of God's place on His heavenly throne.

Envoy—An official representative of a king, leader, or government.

Evidence—Proof that something is true or real.

Exists—Something that is truly a part of the world. Example: Lions are real (they exist). Unicorns are not real (do not exist).

Genuine—To be honest and truthful.

Gratitude—An attitude of thankfulness.

Guarantee—A promise that something will happen a certain way.

Horizontally—Positioned in a side by side relationship.

Illustrate—To explain something by drawing a picture, or by using examples to help people understand.

Imagery—A description of something that helps someone visualize an important idea. Songwriters often use words to help singers have a mental image or picture of the song.

Inseparable—Two ideas, things, or people that are always together.

Meditate—To think deeply about something, especially the words of the Bible.

Mirror—To look like something or someone else.

Nourish / Nourishment—To provide food, drink, or other things that help a person or animal stay alive.

Nutrients—Vitamins and minerals in the food or drink that help a person remain alive and grow.

Obstacles—Barriers, something in the way, preventing progress.

Peace treaty—An agreement between two groups of people or two nations not to fight each other through war.

Peasant—A person who is not educated and is in a lower social group.

Pilgrim / Pilgrims—A person or people who travel on a special spiritual journey.

Pilgrimage—A spiritual journey. This can be a real journey (to a holy place) or an inner journey of the heart (towards a holy character).

Posture—The way a person sits or stands.

Priority—Something or someone that is more important than others.

Primarily—Mainly, or at first, originally.

Productive—Able to make or produce things or services.

Prosperity—Usually means financial success and comfort.

Reliance—Depending on someone or something for help.

Reluctantly—To do something unwillingly, or doing something you don't want to do.

Remorse—Being sorry for doing something bad in the past.

Restoration—Making something the way it was before.

Reveal—To take something hidden and show it to people (God reveals Himself to us).

Revelation—God's special communication of His message to people. Sometimes God reveals (shows) His message through dreams, the Spirit, or angels.

Sacrifice system—The rules and ceremonies for sacrificing animals to God as part of worship and forgiveness of sins. Moses helped set up the system in obedience to God's commands.

Shifted—Moved or changed.

Sovereign—A king, one in control. God has all power. He is over all things.

Steroids—A medicine that can make a person's body stronger.

Supremacy—Having more power or authority.

Suspended—A type of punishment that removes the person from an activity.

Temporary / Temporal—Lasting a short time.

Tolerate—To put up with something you do not like.

Tongue—Refers to the languages of different groups.

Tribe—A group of people who share the same language, beliefs, and culture.

Vertically—Positioned in an up and down relationship.

Victim—A person who has been wronged by another person.

Violation—An action that is against the law.

RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS AND LEADERS

- On-Line Commentary: <http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/index.htm>
- Bible verses in this publication are from the New Century Version (NCV).
- The ASL Bible is produced by Deaf Missions and available at www.deafmissionsstore.com
- The ASL Bible for mobile devices is available at www.DeafBible.com or www.Bible.is/Deaf
- Let's Sign Hymnal and the ASL Bible are available on Amazon

Explore the Bible®

LEADER GUIDE

1 I shall not want.
2 ^cHe maketh me to lie down
2 green pastures: ^dhe leadeth me
side the ³still waters.

3 He restoreth my soul: ^ehe
eth me in the paths of righte-
for his name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through
valley of /the shadow of death,
will fear no evil: ^ffor thou
me; thy rod and thy staff
fort me.

5 ^gThou preparest a table
in the presence of mine
thou ^hanointest my head
my cup runneth over.

6 Surely goodness and
follow me all the days
of my life: and thou shalt
lead me in righteousness.

Psalms

Session 1

THE PATH

Believers should accept godly wisdom, because obedience to God's Word is the path of true life.

PSALM 1

MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 1:6

PLAN AHEAD

- Pray for group members. Pray that they will choose the path of life.
- Ask _____ to study the Introduction to the Book of Psalms and summarize it for the class.
- Make the lesson come alive! Find a picture of a tree or a group of trees beside a stream or river. You will use this in the discussion of verses 1-3.
- Review the verses from In Your Context. Be ready to explain the plan of salvation to the group.

FOCUS ATTENTION

Begin the session with the introductory information about the Book of Psalms. Let the volunteer share the information with the group. **Ask:** Are there some verses from Psalms that are special to you? Let them share. Many Christians are familiar with Psalm 23, Psalm 119:11, or Psalm 119:105.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. The Path of Life (Psalm 1:1-3)

Show the picture of the trees growing by the river. **Ask:** Why does the tree grow well in this place? Sign Psalm 1:1-3. **Ask:** How can we be like a tree planted by water? (Love the law of the Lord, think about/meditate on it.)

Ask: What does it mean to "love the Lord's teachings"? (Include obeying His teachings, thinking about them, sharing with others.) Ask someone to sign Jeremiah 17:7-8 for another picture of a tree planted by water. Ask the group to describe the tree from those verses (strong, not afraid, doesn't worry).

When we spend a lot of time with someone, we tend to become like that person. **Ask:** Whom do people want to be like? The writers of the Book of Psalms made it clear that we will be happy/blessed as we spend time in the Word. We can become more like Christ as we spend more time with Him. Ask the group to share their ideas for studying the Bible. Encourage them to spend time with the Lord each day.

2. The Path of Death (Psalm 1:4-5)

Ask a volunteer to sign Psalm 1:4-5. Compare the life of the Christian (tree planted by water) with the life of the wicked. Discuss “chaff” as described in the lesson. In the same way the seed is separated from the chaff, God’s people will be separated from the wicked. When wicked people reject God and His laws, they choose death. **Ask:** What does it mean to “choose death”? (Separation from God, spiritual death, physical death.)

3. The Conclusion (Psalm 1:6)

The Bible is clear that the wicked will be separated from God. God will punish them. It is important to understand that God takes care of His people and holds us forever. (See Romans 8:29-39.) It is also important to understand that those who reject God’s plan for salvation through faith in Jesus will suffer forever. (See Luke 16:19-26.) God gives us a choice. He does not force people to follow Him. We can choose life and happiness in Him or we can choose sin and destruction.

In Deuteronomy 30:15-19, Joshua offered the Israelites a similar choice. Sign these verses and discuss. Joshua encouraged the Israelites to choose life.

IN MY CONTEXT

Ask: How can we choose life today? God offers us salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ. Share the plan of salvation with the group. There may be someone who is not a Christian in the group. If they are all Christians, they can review how to share Christ with others. You can use the following verses: Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Romans 5:8, Romans 10:13, and Revelation 3:20. If there is time, ask one or two members to share their testimony. Encourage the group to share Jesus with someone this week.

Session 2

THE PAST

We can learn from the past as we compare God's faithfulness with the unfaithfulness of people.

PSALM 78

MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 78:35

PLAN AHEAD

- Pray for group members. Pray they will learn from history and become wise.
- Review the story of Deborah (Judges 4) and Gideon (Judges 6) so you can give a summary of the two stories.
- Ask _____ to introduce Psalm 78. Use the information from Understand the Context to tell about Psalm 78.

FOCUS ATTENTION

Remind the group about the study of the Book of Judges a few months ago. Briefly give a summary of the story of Deborah. After God saved the Israelites from Jabin's army, "Again the Israelites did what the Lord said was wrong" (Judges 6:1). God punished the people. When they cried out to God, He called Gideon to lead an army to defeat the Midianites. After that, what happened? The Israelites did not learn to obey God. They did not learn from their history.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Teach for the Future (Psalm 78:5-8)

Ask the volunteer to introduce Psalm 78. Explain that Asaph wanted people to become wise. One way to become wise is to learn God's commands. Sign verses 5-8. Ask if anyone remembers what God said about teaching the children. Sign Deuteronomy 6:6-9. These verses describe how to teach children God's ways: "Always remember these commands I give you today."

Teach them to your children, and talk about them when you sit at home and walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them down and tie them to your hands as a sign. Tie them on your forehead to remind you, and write them on your doors and gates.”

Ask: Why is it important to teach God’s commands? (See Psalm 78:7-8.) We, and our children, need to trust God and remember what He has done. This is not just an Old Testament idea. This is important for us today, also. Discuss examples of talking about God’s commands while sitting at home or walking along the road (or riding in the car).

2. Remember the Past (Psalm 78:32-37)

Ask the group to look at Psalm 78:13-16. On the board, write the miracles that God did for the Israelites. Then sign verses 32-37 (or ask a volunteer to sign the verses).

Ask: Why is it important to remember the past? We need to learn from past mistakes. We need to improve and do better. Some people say that smart people learn from their own mistakes; wise people learn from the mistakes of others. Asaph wanted the Israelites to learn from the past, so they would not make the same mistakes. They could do better than their ancestors. Their ancestors did not truly repent and follow God. **Ask:** What does *repent* mean? Discuss how repenting is more than being sorry. Sometimes people are sorry for their sin. Maybe they are just sorry someone caught them. But repent means to turn away from the sin, stop doing it, and turn to God.

Divide the class into two groups. Ask one group to list some things they have learned from their own mistakes. Ask the other group to list some things they have learned from others’ mistakes. After about five minutes let the groups share their lists with the other groups.

3. Compassion in the Present (Psalm 78:38-39)

Ask someone to sign verses 38-39. **Ask:** What is mercy? Let members answer. It is a way that God shows His love and kindness to His people. We deserve His punishment, but God chooses to show mercy. He forgives and is patient with us. **Ask:** How does God show His mercy to people?

IN MY CONTEXT

Ask if anyone has memorized John 3:16. Let them sign the verse to the group. This verse is the perfect picture of God’s love, grace, and mercy to us. Discuss how God has forgiven our sin and given us new life.

Discuss: What can we learn from the Israelites mistakes? How can we encourage each other to obey God closely?

Pray together. Ask God to help us learn from our past so we will follow Him more closely.

Session 3

THE SHEPHERD

We can trust God because He is always good.

PSALM 23

MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 23:1

PLAN AHEAD

- Pray for group members. Pray that they will feel the comfort of their Shepherd taking care of them.
- Think about a difficult time in your life when God helped you and gave you comfort. Prepare to tell the class about your experience. If you don't have an experience to share, perhaps you know of someone else's experience you can tell them.
- Make the lesson come alive! Bring a cane or walking stick to class.
- Ask a volunteer to practice signing the story of Jesus, the Good Shepherd (John 10:11-15). They will sign the story for the class. This story is available in ASL on deafgobible.com or on the Deaf Go Bible app.

FOCUS ATTENTION

Begin by calling on volunteers to share facts they know about shepherds.

Ask: What makes a shepherd appealing?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Provides (Psalm 23:1-3)

David had experience as a shepherd. He knew how a shepherd took care of sheep. David recognized the ways God took care of him. God protected David and gave him what he needed. He talks of "new strength." **Ask:** How is this concept written in other Bible translations? (Restores my soul, refreshes my

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soul, renews my life.) Use information from this section in the personal study guide to discuss some of the times God gave David new strength.

Ask: Why does God lead us on the right path? Verse 3 says “for the good of His name.” Discuss what this means.

2. Guards (Psalm 23:4)

Show the cane or walking stick that you brought. **Ask:** What could you use this for? Although this looks different from a rod or staff that a shepherd used, it helps make the idea clear. You can use a cane for support and help with walking. You can also use it for protection. David used this picture of the shepherd using the rod and staff for comfort and protection. The Shepherd was with him during difficult times. Members of the group may remember the stories about how David ran from King Saul. Saul wanted to kill David, but God protected David.

Share your experience of going through a “dark valley” and how God comforted you. **Ask:** Have you had hard experiences? How did God help you get through? Let members share and discuss how God helped them.

3. Hosts (Psalm 23:5-6)

David talked about God’s care for him even when his enemies were around. He also talked about God’s anointing. David knew God wanted him to do something important. Ask members to read Ephesians 2:10. **Ask:** Why did God make people? What does He want them to do? God chose us to do good works for Him. We are special to Him.

David knew he would be with God forever. **Ask:** How can Christians know they will be with God forever? Share the following verses with the class, or ask members to sign the verses: John 6:40; Romans 8:35-38; John 10:27-29. You may want to add other verses, or ask members to share verses that help them remember they will be with God forever. God’s promises give confidence and comfort.

IN MY CONTEXT

Ask the volunteer to sign the story of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. **Discuss:** How is David’s description of the Shepherd the same as Jesus’ description of Himself? How is it different?

Discuss the questions from In My Context in the personal study guide.

Close with prayer. Pray specifically for the friends named who need to know the Shepherd. Pray that group members will share openly with friends who need Jesus.

Remind the group to read the lesson for next week before class. The lesson asks them to write a psalm. They will need time to think about that so they can prepare.

Session 4

OUR RESPONSE

Thanksgiving is the proper response to God's answer to our prayers.

PSALM 138

MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 138:1

PLAN AHEAD

- Pray for class members. Pray they will recognize and thank God for His character.
- Ask _____ to be prepared to share the psalm they wrote.
- Prepare your own psalm. Do not worry about perfect English. It is more important that the signs are clear and communicate your love and thanksgiving to God.
- Write the lesson outline on the board or paper.

FOCUS ATTENTION

Explain the difference between thanking God for what He has done and praising God for who He is. **Ask:** How has God answered your prayers? Do you remember to thank Him for His answers? Remind the group that sometimes we don't see God's answers to our prayers because we do not ask specifically. If we only say "God bless us," we may not recognize His answers. But if we pray specifically, we will notice when He answers. David prayed for specific things and he thanked God for answering.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. I Will Thank (Psalm 138:1-3)

Ask: What does it mean to thank God with our whole heart? Use the information from the personal study guide to explain this idea. Discuss how we can be thankful all the time, not just on Sundays or only at church. We can express to friends, family, and coworkers, that we are thankful to God

at all times. We can develop an attitude of thankfulness that influences our daily lives.

2. They Will Bow (Psalm 138:4-6)

There are two key points in these verses. First, David wanted all the world to know God. Paul shared the same desire in Philippians 2:10-11: "...every knee will bow at the name of Jesus..." It is the Christian's duty to tell others how great God is and share the Good News (Acts 1:8).

Second, David told us that God helps humble people but avoids the proud.

Ask: Have you ever tried to help someone who did not want your help? How did that feel? **Discuss:** Do you know anyone who feels like he does not need God's help? Do some people feel they can take care of things better than God can? This is what pride is like. **Ask:** What does it mean to be humble? Give some examples.

3. God Will Fulfill (Psalm 138:7-8)

Notice in these verses that David did not expect things to be easy. He knew he would have troubles. He knew his enemies would be angry. But he also knew that God was always with Him. David knew God would help him.

Ask: How do we know that God is with us? Discuss.

Ask a member of the group to sign Matthew 28:19-20. Emphasize the last sentence. When Jesus gave us the most important job to do, He promised to be with us always. In John 17:15, Jesus prayed for His followers. He asked the Father to protect them. In Acts 1:8 Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would live in His followers. We can be ever thankful that God is always with us.

IN MY CONTEXT

Ask the volunteer to sign their psalm for the class. If you were not able to get a volunteer, you can sign your psalm for the class. You could also make this a group activity. Choose a handshape, such as "1" or flat hand. Go around the circle and have each person sign "God is _____" (fill in the blank with a sign that uses that handshape). Examples with the "1" handshape: God is real, God is eternal, etc. Examples with the flat handshape: God is wonderful, God is good, etc. After each person does his or her sentence, the others in the group can sign it, too.

Close with prayer praising God for who He is and thanking Him for what He has done.

Session 5

HIS PRESENCE

Security is found in the assurance of God's presence.

PSALM 84

MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 84:12

PLAN AHEAD

- Pray for class members. Pray they will grow in their desire to spend time with God and His people.
- Find a picture of the tabernacle and the temple. Remind the group about David's love for the tabernacle. The session today will focus on the writer's love for the temple.

FOCUS ATTENTION

Begin by inviting volunteers to share about their favorite places to visit. Encourage them to share why they like those places.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. The Passion (Psalm 84:1-4)

Imagine going to a place that you love. In that place you feel refreshed. In that place you feel joy. You feel the presence of God there. Now imagine that you can't go to that place anymore. Some Bible teachers believe that the writer of this psalm could not go to the temple for some reason. Perhaps there were enemies around him who prevented him from making the trip. He loved to be in the temple, but now he could not travel there. This psalm comes from his deep desire to be with God. He wanted to be in the temple more than any other place. He wanted to worship God. **Ask:** What does it mean to worship God? Why does God want us to worship Him?

2. The Priority (Psalm 84:5-7)

Ask a volunteer to sign verses 5-7. Explain that the trip to the temple was not

an easy trip. The writer of the psalm knew that God gave the people strength for their travel. Ask another volunteer to sign Isaiah 40:29-31. Discuss how Isaiah described strength from God. Share with the group how God has given you strength when you prepare to worship or while you worship Him. Ask them to share their experiences.

3. The Prayer (Psalm 84:8-9)

In verses 8-9 the writer prayed for the king. **Ask:** Why do you think he prayed for the king? Explain that if enemies prevented the writer from making the trip, God could give the king power to destroy the enemy. This would help the writer be able to travel to the temple again.

It is important that we pray for the leaders of our country. In some countries Christians do not have freedom to worship as the United States allows. Leaders have power to influence the laws of their country. Christians need to pray for their brothers and sisters around the world. We can ask God to give them safety as they worship Him.

4. The Presence (Psalm 84:10-12)

Divide the members into two groups. Ask each group to look through the verses in Psalm 84 and find the descriptions of God. Give them five minutes to make a list. Then bring them back together to share their lists. The writer describes God as all-powerful (verses 1,3,8, and 12); living (verse 2); a giver of strength (verse 5); King (verse 3); a sun and shield (verse 11); and a giver of kindness and honor (verse 11).

After members share the descriptions of God, ask them if they can think of more ways to describe God. Let them share more. **Ask:** Do you think God is worthy of our worship and praise? The writer of this psalm believed God was worthy. He wanted to be with God's people in God's temple.

IN MY CONTEXT

Explain that the temple represented God to the people of Israel. It was a very special place for them to worship Him. Solomon said, "But no one can really build a house for our God. Not even the highest of heavens can hold Him. How then can I build a temple for Him except as a place to burn sacrifices to Him?" (2 Chronicles 2:6).

What about today? Do we need a temple or a building to worship God? The Holy Spirit lives in God's people today. Sign 1 Corinthians 6:19. We can worship God anyplace at any time. It is still important for us to worship Him together. Ask someone to sign Hebrews 10:25. **Ask:** Why is it important for Christians to meet together? Discuss.

Close in prayer. Ask God to give us joy in worshiping Him and being with His people.

Session 6

THE CREATOR

Believers should worship God above all else, because He is **sovereign**.

PSALM 95

MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 95:6

PLAN AHEAD

- Pray for class members. Pray that they will recognize that we worship a sovereign God.
- Ask _____ (a volunteer) to practice telling the creation story.
- Review the stories in Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 20:2-13.
- Bring a camera to record the group songs.

FOCUS ATTENTION

Ask the volunteer to begin the session by signing the creation story.

Explain that the writer of Psalm 95 wanted people to remember how powerful God is. God is the creator of all things. He is sovereign. We should worship Him.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. What (Psalm 95:1-2)

Review the information from the First Thoughts in the personal study guide. It explains how we should worship with the right attitude and right actions. Remind them of David's encouragement to worship and thank God with our whole heart (Psalm 138—session 4). God wants us to be honest and real in our worship. He also wants us to enjoy Him. The writer of Psalm 95 encouraged the readers to sing with joy. We are to be full of praise and

thanksgiving. Tell the group they will have an opportunity to practice this at the end of the session.

2. Who (Psalm 95:3-5)

In verses 3-5 the writer reminded the people that they worshiped the God who made all things. Review the creation story. **Ask:** What did God make on the first day? (Continue with the six days of creation.) Our God is powerful and over all things. The key doctrine in this session is about the sovereignty of God. Discuss this concept with the group.

3. How (Psalm 95:6-7a)

Verse 6 talks about kneeling before God as we worship Him. **Ask:** What does kneeling show about our feelings for someone? What else can we do with our bodies to show our feelings of respect for God?

Using sign language in song and praise is a wonderful way to physically worship God. Some hearing people raise their hands when they worship. Some dance. People want a way to show worship in a physical way. Our language allows for communicating in a very physical way.

4. When (Psalm 95:7b-11)

Verses 7-11 are a warning to the people. Remind the class about the stories in Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 20:2-13. In both situations the people of Israel argued with God. They did not show the right attitude to Him. The writer expressed the danger we face if we act like the Israelites did. In the same way, Jesus warned the Pharisees about their attitudes. He said they showed honor to Him with their words but their hearts were far from Him. (See Matthew 15:8.) We want to be sure to have the right attitude in our worship. David said, "I hope my words and thoughts please you. LORD, you are my Rock, the one who saves me" (Psalm 19:14). May we have the same prayer.

IN MY CONTEXT

Divide the group into smaller groups of 3 or 4. Ask them to work together to develop a song of praise to God. They could come up with something new. They could use the psalm they developed in session 4 and add rhythm or more praise words to it. They could use a psalm and sign their favorite lines from the psalm or repeat them. Encourage them to be creative. They will need time to do this (15 to 20 minutes.) When they are ready, ask them to sign their songs for the larger group. Consider recording the songs so they can remember them.

Close in prayer. Thank God for His creation.

Session 7

GOD REVEALED

God reveals Himself through His creation and His Word.

PSALM 19

MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 19:1

PLAN AHEAD

- Pray for class members. Ask God to help them see Him in His creation and in His Word.
- Ask _____ (a volunteer) to prepare to sign 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

FOCUS ATTENTION

Ask: When someone communicates to us, what do we do in response? (Nod, answer, show our feelings in our facial expression) We cannot see God. But God shows Himself to people. He communicates with us in different ways. In the study today, we will discuss two ways that He communicates to us or shows Himself to us.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Seen in Creation (Psalm 19:1-6)

First, God communicates to us through His creation. Sign Psalm 19:1-6 or ask one of the group members to sign it. **Ask:** When we see the world around us, what do we know about God? (He is powerful. He is creative.) How do we respond to that? (Thank God for His work, worship the Creator.)

Romans 1:20-23 explains how some people saw the world/creation and decided to worship idols. Their idols looked like people, birds, or snakes. They sinned by ignoring God who made all things. They worshiped the things God made but did not worship the Creator. Paul said the people had no excuse for

their sin. They could know something about God because they saw what He made.

2. Seen in His Word (Psalm 19:7-11)

God communicates with people in another way. This way of communication is very clear and specific. Ask the group to read verses 7-11. **Ask:** How does God's Word help His people? List answers on the board.

Now ask the volunteer to sign 2 Timothy 3:16-17. **Ask:** From these verses, what does God's Word do for us? List answers on the board. **Ask:** When the Bible shows us what we do wrong, how can we respond? (Confess, ask for forgiveness.) When the Bible teaches us something new, how can we respond? (Learn, thank Him) When the Bible shows us how to live right, how can we respond? (Make changes in our lives.) Often we read God's Word and reply with, "Hmm, that's nice" or "Oh, I see." God expects more. He is communicating important information to us. We should respond to Him in the right ways.

Sign verses 10-11. Discuss how valuable God's Word is. Isaiah 40:8 says, "The grass dies and the flowers fall, but the Word of our God will live forever."

3. Celebrated in His People (Psalm 19:12-14)

David responded to God's communication with him. He saw how God made the world. David understood God's written Word was helpful for him. Sign verses 12-14. **Ask:** What was David's response to God? David wanted to be clean. He wanted his life to make God happy. He even wanted his thoughts to be right before God.

How can we be clean before God? John 1:14 says, "The Word became human and lived among us." Jesus, the Word of God, came in human form and became the sacrifice for our sin. Through faith in Him we have forgiveness and are free from sin. Ask the group to read 1 John 1:9. This is a wonderful promise from God for forgiveness and cleansing.

IN MY CONTEXT

Encourage members to share what they learned about God. When we see God's creation, we can tell others about how wonderful He is. When we learn from His Word, we can share what we learned with others. As we think about His Word, we will make God happy.

Ask the class to sign Psalm 19:14 together. Make this into a prayer to God. Sign it together a few times so everyone can remember it. Then ask them to sign it to God.

Session 8

HIS LOVE

God's unchanging love gives us reasons to celebrate.

PSALM 136

MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 136:1

PLAN AHEAD

- Pray for class members.
- Ask _____ (a volunteer) to practice signing the story of how the Israelites left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea (Exodus 14). The story needs to include how the Egyptians chased the Israelites into the Sea and drowned.
- Prepare a song. See the explanation in the In Your Context section on the next page. Prepare one of your own to share with the class as an example or in case there is not enough time for the group activity.

FOCUS ATTENTION

Explain the concept of God's loving kindness (*hesed*) from the First Thoughts section of the study. In Psalm 136, the writer wrote about ways God shows love to His people. After each verse he repeated, "His love continues forever." This is the only Psalm in which the same line is repeated. This line is repeated 26 times. It may seem like a lot, but it works well in a song. It also emphasizes God's love and helps us remember it.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. In Creation (Psalm 136:1-5)

As the writer of this psalm thought about who God is and what God did, he was filled with thanksgiving. As we have seen in other psalms, Psalm 136 focuses on God's power in creation. The writer also saw the creation as one of

the ways God shows love to His people. God shares His creation with us.

Ask: How can we show our thanks to God for His creation?

2. In Conquest (Psalm 136:10-15)

Ask members if they remember the story of the Israelites leaving Egypt. Ask the volunteer to tell the story. Others can add things to the story that they remember. Explain that in Psalm 136:10-15, the writer listed parts of the story and again repeats the line, “His love continues forever.” He emphasized that God showed love to His people and destroyed their enemies.

Ask: Do you remember other times that God destroyed Israel’s enemies? (At Jericho, stories from the Book of Judges, etc.) God was faithful to the Israelites. The writer of Psalm 136 wanted the people to remember how God showed His love.

3. In Compassion (Psalm 136:23-26)

Again the writer emphasized God’s love and power in saving the Israelites from their enemies. **Ask:** How has God saved Christians? He saved us from sin. He gave us new life. Sign 2 Corinthians 5:17. **Ask:** Paul said we are a “new creation.” What does this mean? Discuss.

We can give thanks for our spiritual salvation. God showed His great love by sending His Son to die for us (Romans 5:8). We are made new in Christ. He is also preparing a new home for us (John 14:2-3).

IN MY CONTEXT

Divide the group into smaller groups of 3 or 4. Ask them to make a list of 5 things for which they are thankful. The things could be characteristics of God or things He does, such as: God is faithful, God is powerful, God answers prayer, etc. They could also list things that help them know that God loves them. For example: He will take me to heaven, He is always with me, He provides food and shelter, etc. Make the list into a song of thanksgiving to God by adding, “His love continues forever” after each thing on the list. When the groups are ready, ask them to sign their songs for the larger group. Everyone can join in signing, “His love continues forever” after each line.

Close in prayer. Pray that our hearts will be full of joy as we thank God for His great love.

Session 9

HIS FAITHFULNESS

We can trust God because He reigns eternally.

PSALM 146

MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 146:6

PLAN AHEAD

- Pray for class members. Pray they will come to understand that God is always faithful.
- Ask _____ (a volunteer) to prepare to tell the story of the Israelites and the Gideonites. (See Joshua 9.)

FOCUS ATTENTION

Has someone ever disappointed you terribly? Perhaps you trusted the person to do something for you, but they did not do what you expected. Or maybe you expected that person to act a certain way, but they did something very different. People will make mistakes. We will be disappointed. But as Christians, we know Someone who never disappoints. He always does what He says He will do. He is always the same. We can trust Him to be faithful.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. The Declaration (Psalm 146:1-2)

The writer of Psalm 146 made a decision and announced his decision to others. What was his decision? He made a promise to praise God for the rest of his life. He wanted to praise God with his whole being. **Ask:** What does whole being mean? How can we praise God with our whole self? (Use the information in the personal study guide to help with this discussion.)

2. The Warning (Psalm 146:3-4)

Sign Psalm 146:3-4. The writer made it clear that God is the only One we can trust completely. He gave a strong warning not to trust leaders and other people. Use the information from this section in the study for examples. The Israelites trusted other people and kings at different times in their history.

Ask the volunteer to tell the story of the Israelites and the Gideonites. Emphasize the Israelites did not ask God for advice in this situation. **Ask:** Have you had an experience where you trusted someone and later found the person tricked you or did not do what they promised? How did you feel? Does this mean we should never depend on people and never trust them? No, but we must understand that people will fail. Sometimes they don't intend to hurt us, but they do make mistakes. However, we can completely trust God. We should always ask for His advice (James 1:5). He will never fail.

3. The Worthy One (Psalm 146:5-9)

These verses remind us that God is ruler of all things. He created the earth and all that is in it. He is so different from people and so high above us, and yet He is concerned about each person. He is concerned about those that seem in the lowest positions. Read Psalm 103:6, "The Lord does what is right and fair for those who are wronged by others." **Ask:** Who are "those who are wronged by others"?

God can even use the people of His church to minister to people in need.

Ask: What can the church do to care for the people listed in Psalm 146:7-9?

4. The Reality (Psalm 146:10)

The Lord God is always the same. This is part of His faithfulness. Hebrews 13:8 tells us this also, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." This faithful God is King and rules forever. (See Revelation 11:15.) We have reason to rejoice and praise Him. He remains the same: faithful in His love for us, faithful to His promises, and never changing in His holiness. **Ask:** How can we express our thankfulness to Him?

IN MY CONTEXT

Ask the group to think about how God has been faithful to them. Challenge them to think about their lives this week and make a list of things that God has done for them. Ask them to consider making a promise to praise the Lord all of their lives.

Close with a prayer asking God to remind us of His faithfulness always.

Session 10

THE CONFESSION

The realization of sin should encourage us to confess and repent of our sins.

PSALM 51

MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 51:10

PLAN AHEAD

- Pray for group members.
- **Stories:** There are two stories that will introduce the psalm for today's session. Ask two members of your group to prepare one story each. One will tell the story of David and Bathsheba from 2 Samuel 11. The other will tell the story of Nathan confronting David about his sin from 2 Samuel 12:1-11. If needed, you can tell one of the stories or both.

FOCUS ATTENTION

Ask the volunteers to present the two stories as an introduction to the session. **Ask:** David loved God and followed Him. How do you think he felt when he realized how terrible his sin was?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Guilty as Charged (Psalm 51:1-5)

Nathan helped David understand his sin by telling him a story. When David realized Nathan was talking about him, David confessed. He expressed his feelings in this psalm.

Ask: Do you remember the main theme in the session last week? It was about God's faithfulness. David remembered that God is the same. Even though David sinned, He knew that God's love remained. David began his psalm asking for mercy because of God's love. It is wonderful to know that

even when we are not faithful, God continues to be faithful. He continues to be loving and full of mercy and grace. He is ready to forgive (1 John 1:9).

Ask: Whom did David sin against? (Allow for answers.) Which of the Ten Commandments did David break? (Exodus 20:13,14,17.) David knew that his sin was really against God.

In verse 5 David said God is right when He speaks. This is an important part of confession. Some people think of confession as just admitting they did something. It is also agreeing with God about our sin. We realize that we have done wrong and need forgiveness.

2. Plea for Cleansing (Psalm 51:6-13)

David wanted to be clean again. Sin had left him feeling dirty. He was also concerned about losing the Holy Spirit. Remind members that Saul, the first king of Israel, sinned against God. He made excuses for his sin. God rejected Saul as king, and the Holy Spirit left Saul. David saw how Saul acted after that. Saul became jealous of David and tried to kill him. David begged God not to take away the Holy Spirit. David wanted to enjoy the relationship with God as he did before. **Ask:** When Christians sin today, do they lose the Holy Spirit? (No, He stays with us always, teaching us, leading us, and convicting us of our sin.)

3. Deliverance through Heartbreak (Psalm 51:14-17)

David wanted to sing about God again. He wanted to praise God. He wanted to feel good and not feel guilt anymore. Ask the group to read Psalm 51:16-17. David said God wants a broken spirit/heart. What does that mean? Discuss. Review the information in this section of the personal study guide to help with the discussion.

God loves His people as a perfect father loves his children. He wants to keep a close relationship with His people. We can only stay close to Him if we have clean hearts before Him. We need to stay in the Word so we can recognize when we sin, confess, and start new.

IN MY CONTEXT

Sin began in David when he looked at Bathsheba and lusted for her. He added more and more sin. He then continued with his life until Nathan confronted him about his sin. He must have felt far from God, but he tried to keep going.

Ask: Have you had an experience like this? (No need to answer.) We all sometimes need to check our hearts to see if we are holding onto sin without confessing it. Psalm 139 is a psalm about how God knows everything. Sign Psalm 139:23-24.

Close with prayer. Ask God to show all of us if we have any sin so we can confess it to Him.

Session 11

THE CLEANSING

God's complete forgiveness of those who turn to Him in faith produces **gratitude**.

PSALM 32

MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 32:11

PLAN AHEAD

- Pray for class members. Pray they will experience the joy of a clean heart.
- Think of an experience you had as a child or young person where you tried to hide something from your parents or a teacher. Describe your feelings to the group.
- Ask volunteers to sign the verses from each section of the lesson so they can prepare before the session begins.

FOCUS ATTENTION

Use information from First Thoughts and Understand the Context in the personal study guide. Recall last week's stories and David's prayer of confession and request for forgiveness. Psalm 32 describes David's feelings before and after God forgave him.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. The Contrast (Psalm 32:1-4)

We do not know how long David held on to his sin before he finally confessed. It was probably several months. Ask a volunteer to sign Psalm 32:3-4. **Ask:** Have you ever tried to hide a sin, maybe as a child? (It may be easier to discuss things that happened when they were children.) How did it feel? Did you feel like David? Share your experience.

Most of us experienced trying to hide something from our parents, a

teacher, or from God. David described the feelings well. **Ask:** How does it feel to confess and have forgiveness? Ask a volunteer to sign Psalm 32:1-2. **Ask:** Does forgiveness make you feel happy?

2. The Decision (Psalm 32:5)

David explained the difference between the joy of forgiveness and the misery of hiding sin. He then announced his decision to confess. Use the information from this section in the personal study guide to explain the meaning of true confession and repentance.

We have a choice like David did. We can hold on to our sins. The Holy Spirit will convict us of our sins. We will not have true joy if we keep sin in our hearts. Or we can confess our sins to God and enjoy His forgiveness (1 John 1:9).

Last week we ended the session with a prayer asking God to show us our sin. Perhaps someone would like to share how God worked in his or her life related to that prayer.

3. The Counsel (Psalm 32:6-9)

David encouraged others to pray and confess. He experienced the joy of forgiveness and wanted others to experience the same. We discussed in earlier sessions about learning from others' mistakes. David wanted us to learn from his mistakes. He found the way to have joy in the Lord and wanted others to have that joy, also.

Ask: If we confess our sins, does that mean we will not have to pay for our sins or suffer punishment? Discuss. **Explain:** Suppose a man steals money from a bank. He can confess to God, and God will forgive him. However, he must give the money back and may spend time in jail. In the same way, we may suffer because of our sin. David did. But David kept a close relationship with God because he was willing to confess and repent.

David said people should pray "while you still can." Discuss what this means. Use information from the personal study guide.

4. The Conclusion (Psalm 32:10-11)

Ask a member to sign Psalm 32:10-11. David again compared the wicked with people who trust God. Good people can rejoice and be happy. **Ask:** How can we show joy and happiness to others? How can we teach others about the joy of forgiveness?

IN MY CONTEXT

Discuss the questions from this section of the personal study guide. Encourage members to keep their hearts clean before God so they can experience His joy. Close in prayer.

Session 12

THE PROTECTOR

Believers should seek refuge in God, because He is the only One who can give them strength to face temptation and evil.

PSALM 141

MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 141:8

PLAN AHEAD

- Pray for group members. Ask God to help them understand the need for accountability.
- Ask three volunteers to sign the verses for each section of the session. Give them time to prepare.

FOCUS ATTENTION

Begin by reminding the group that many police cars feature the statement “To protect and to serve” painted on them. **Ask:** How does that slogan explain the role of a police officer? Explain that David focused on God as Protector in the psalm being studied today.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. The Plea (Psalm 141:1-2)

Ask someone to sign verses 1-2. David began his psalm asking God to answer his prayers. He offered his prayers like a sacrifice to God. Have you ever thought of your prayers as a gift to God? Do our prayers make Him happy with us? Are they like a sweet smelling incense to Him? See Revelation 5:8 and 8:3-4 for a picture of this.

God wants us to talk with Him. Ask members to sign the following verses: Matthew 26:41; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Philippians 4:6-7.

2. The Requests (Psalm 141:3-7)

Ask someone to sign verses 3-7. David wanted to avoid and resist temptation.

As we have studied, David understood the danger, misery, and consequences of sin. He asked for God's protection.

The central theme of these verses is David's desire for accountability (verse 5). Ask the group to recall examples from the personal study guide of people who helped David not to sin. **Ask:** Do you have Christian friends who help you resist the temptation to sin? Christians need other Christians to help them stay strong in the Lord (Proverbs 27:17).

Many Christians do not feel comfortable when a friend corrects them or gives advice about Christian living. They may know they need an "accountability partner" but may not trust anyone to do that for them. How can we change this attitude? **Ask:** What kind of characteristics do you want an accountability partner to have? (Wise, caring, can trust, will not talk about me, etc.) Take some time to talk about these characteristics.

If there is enough time, play the Gossip game. Ask several group members to stand in a line. Have all of them turn away from you except the one closest to you. Sign a message to that person. (for example: Please pray for Bill. He has much pain and must have surgery. But he doesn't want anyone to know.) They will then tap the next person on the shoulder and sign the same message to that person (what they remember). Then continue down the line. Compare the message the last person says with your beginning sentences. Were they the same? Probably not. This game shows how important it is not to talk about others. The message usually gets mixed up and then those people will not trust us.

Ask: How can we become wise, caring, trustworthy people? How can we help each other resist temptation? How can we help each other grow in Christ?

3. The Promise (Psalm 141:8-10)

Ask a member to sign verses 8-10. **Ask:** Where does David look for help? Whom does he trust? What did David ask God to do?

Isaiah knew the importance of trusting in God. He said, "You, Lord, give true peace to those who depend on You, because they trust You" (Isaiah 26:3). When David sinned he did not have peace. After his confession and repentance, he had peace with God. He wanted to keep that peace so he trusted in God.

IN MY CONTEXT

Discuss the questions from In My Context in the personal study guide. Talk about how members can become accountable to each other. Remind the group that as we focus on God, we can live in a way that pleases Him.

Close with a prayer asking God to help us focus on Him and resist temptation.

Session 13

THE LONGING

The hope of God's presence serves as encouragement during discouraging times.

PSALM 42

MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 42

PLAN AHEAD

- Pray for class members. Pray especially that God would give comfort to those who are sad, discouraged or depressed.
- Ask _____ (a volunteer) to prepare to sign the story of Job from Job 1. Prepare by adding to the story as explained below.
- Ask volunteers to practice signing the three sections of Scripture so they will be prepared to sign them during the session.

FOCUS ATTENTION

Ask your volunteer to sign the story of Job. **Ask:** How do you think Job felt?

Add: Next God allowed Satan to hurt Job physically. Job still trusted God and did not sin against Him. Job had three friends who tried to comfort him but really made him feel worse. Through all of this, Job said, "Even if God kills me, I have hope in Him" (Job 13:5).

Explain: There are others in the Bible who were discouraged and depressed. **Ask:** Do you remember some of these from the study guide? (Allow for answers.) In today's session we will learn about another person who loved God and the temple and God's people, and yet he was very discouraged.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Thirsty (Psalm 42:1-4)

Ask someone to sign these verses. **Ask:** Have any of you felt sad or discouraged? Or do you know someone who has felt this way? (Let them share.) Was it difficult for the person to do everyday activities? Was it difficult

to pray or read the Bible?

The writer of this psalm said he was thirsty for God. What does that mean?

Explain: Many Christians and non-believers suffer from discouragement or depression. They need our encouragement and understanding.

2. Drowning (Psalm 42:5-8)

Some members (or you) may have experienced being in a fast moving stream of water, or in the ocean, or even in a swimming pool and felt you might drown. The writer gives this picture of how he felt with all the troubles in life. He felt he would drown. Ask the volunteer to sign these verses. **Ask:** What did the writer know about God? (He knew God was his Savior, he should keep his hope in God and keep praising Him, God shows His love every day, and God is alive.) How could these facts help him?

It is important for us to remember the truth about God even when we are sad and discouraged. Our feelings do not change who God is. God is always with us even when we do not feel it. He always loves us, even when we have problems. God knows what is happening around us and He cares—even when we don't understand.

3. Crushed (Psalm 42:9-11)

People asked the writer, "Where is God?" They knew he loved God, and when they saw this writer's suffering, they questioned him. Perhaps they made fun of him. Yet he said again, "I should put my hope in God, and keep praising Him." There are many things in our world that we do not understand. We will all experience times of sadness, discouragement, and even depression. We can practice praising God at all times so we can continue to put our hope in Him through all things. Sometimes our discouragement comes from fear. Ask someone to sign Psalm 56:3-4. Sometimes our sadness comes from worry. Ask someone to sign Philippians 4:6-7. It is good to ask, "Why am I sad?" like the psalmist did. We may be able to find comfort in God's Word.

IN MY CONTEXT

Spend some time thinking about the characteristics of God. List these on the board. Examples: God knows all things, God is sovereign, He is everywhere, He is loving, He is eternal, etc. Remembering who God is will help us trust Him even when times are difficult.

Encourage members to prepare for the next lessons from Exodus and Leviticus by reviewing the Introduction and Session 1 in their personal study guide

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