

psalms

background: read this stuff before you begin

WELCOME TO ROOTWORKS

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

I think the most interesting thing about this book is its dual nature. The Psalms are holy Scripture, and this means they are God's Word for us. The Psalms are also mankind's words to God, for they are a collection of songs, hymns, poems, and prayers dedicated to God. When you or I read a Psalm, we are, at the same time, reading God's Word for us and man's word back to God. Take a moment to think about this.

If you struggle with your prayer life (I should probably write WHEN you struggle), the Psalms are a great place to turn. Praying the Psalms back to God can be an amazing experience. I often meet people who say, I don't know what to pray. I almost always encourage those individuals to read the Psalms, and then pray them back to God.

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

RootWorks Bible Studies

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

What does RootWorks mean?

The name RootWorks comes from Colossians 2:6-7 (NLT), which reads:

*And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to live in obedience to him. **Let your roots grow down into him and draw up nourishment from him**, so you will grow in faith, strong and vigorous in the truth you were taught. Let your lives overflow with thanksgiving for all he has done.*

As you can see from reading the passage, maturity in one's relationship with God requires nourishment. The imagery in this passage suggests that our spiritual roots must grow deep so that we'll continue in our vital relationship with God. This type of growth requires putting our ROOTS to WORK. Get it?

What will I find in this workbook?

This book contains eight separate lessons. Each lesson contains two parts:

- a reading selection from the Bible
- some "questions for reflection"

The idea is that you will read the Bible passage a couple times through and think about what it means. Then, you can move on to the questions in order to gain a better understanding of the passage. Remember, the goal of the questions is NOT to prove that you know something. This is not a test; no one will check your answers. These are a different type of questions . . . they exist as a starting point to help you EXPLORE.

Why go to all this work instead of just attending another Bible study?

I've put this notebook together because I want you to learn how to study the Bible by reading it and asking questions. It would be easy for you to find a weekly Bible study to attend. Maybe this is something you are already a part of. Chances are, you show up, sit, and listen to someone else teach. While being a part of this sort of group is very important, it's definitely not the only thing necessary for long-term spiritual maturity. You need to learn to study the Bible on your own. I want you to develop the habit of studying God's Word.

How long will RootWorks take to finish?

The answer to this question depends on how much thought you give to answering the questions. The questions are not intended to be "raced through." Your goal shouldn't be speed; it should be comprehension and personal application. As a general rule, each lesson should take 30-45 minutes.

How often should I complete a lesson?

This depends upon you—upon how often you decide to sit down and work through this material. The idea should be to stay on a consistent pace. You don't want to do too much too fast and get burned out or tired. At the same time, you don't want to answer one question a month—this will break up the continuity and the cohesiveness of the lesson, and you'll be 35 years old by the time you finish.

What do I do when I finish all eight lessons?

Celebrate! You will have worked hard to reach this goal. Chances are, you'll have some questions. If you're not in a small group I'd love to meet with you for a few minutes to hear those questions as well as what you learned as a result of your study. (And if you are in a small group, get together with your leader.) When you finish this RootWorks notebook, print another one from the youth website!

What if I don't know an answer for a specific question?

Keep going. Don't let it discourage you. I will be surprised if you don't have at least one question that "stumps" you. Give it some good thought and then skip it if you don't know the answer.

What Bible translation should I use?

You can use just about any Bible translation and figure out answers to the questions. The questions were written using the NIV translation, but they're worded so you can use almost any Bible and follow along easily. (I prefer the Message, but I realize most people have the NIV.)

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

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

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

HOW TO READ THE BOOK OF THE PSALMS

The Psalms are prayers, but they also happen to be prayers written to God as poems and songs. That means they are not quick, easy reading. Think about reading poetry in your English class at school—you may take a whole class period just to analyze just a few lines of one poem because poems have a lot of meaning packed into just a few words. Keep this in mind as you're reading through the book of Psalms. Other books of the Bible are stories or letters, but the book of Psalms is a book of poetry.

In English, different types of poems have different forms. When you think of an English poem, you probably think of rhyming . . . this is one of the most common forms.

Hebrew poetry has form, too. Instead of being about rhyming, however, it's all about the pairing of ideas and concept—putting two thoughts next to each other in the text.

Sometimes the second thought repeats or restates the first thought. (Think of an apple and another apple.)

Sometimes the second thought is the exact opposite of the first thought. (Think of an apple and an orange.)

Sometimes the second thought restates the first thought, but carries it a little further. (Think of an apple and a bigger apple.)

Remember, these are just the basics, but most of the meaning in the Psalms can be found by building off of these "forms." For example, sometimes these three forms are all used together, or two of them are used in combination, etc. WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER is that when you find yourself getting frustrated and thinking, "Wait, this is saying the same thing over and over again," you're probably right! But that's OK. Realize and recognize that the author intends to do that . . . that's the way Hebrew poetry works. Try to appreciate it and enter into another time and culture instead of saying, "I don't like that . . . it's different than what I'm used to." Take time. If you try to figure out why the author wrote it this way, you will be rewarded.

PSALM EXPLANATIONS

Scholars have broken the Psalms up into a few different "groupings" that can be helpful in understanding each psalm's purpose and form. There are eight different types explained below. It should be noted that some people split the Psalms up into more groups than this, and some others use less. The criteria for what makes a psalm one type as opposed to another are neither perfect nor universally agreed upon, so these are just some general guidelines.

Torah Psalms

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

Wisdom Psalms

Reading a Wisdom Psalm is like reading the book of Proverbs. There’s lots of “practical” advice, contrasting the righteous with the wicked, and the rich and the poor. The emphasis is on trust in the Lord, the gaining of understanding, and the foolishness of solely seeking possessions. (Psalms 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128, 133 are Wisdom Psalms.)

Praise Psalms

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

Lament Psalms

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

Zion Psalms

Zion is “an ancient name for various parts of Jerusalem, of Judah and all the land, and also a metaphor for the people of God...”* Zion Psalms focus on God’s presence among the Israelites—specifically in Jerusalem, although Zion can also be metaphorical. Since God can be found and known, these psalms “express an intense longing to make a pilgrimage to the Temple of Jerusalem.” (Psalms 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122 are Zion Psalms.)

Thanksgiving Psalms

While Praise Psalms focus on the glory of who God is, Thanksgiving Psalms tend to be an expression of gratitude for what God has done. Often times these psalms will follow a common form: the author is distressed, then he calls to God for help, then God comes to his rescue. Thanksgiving Psalms are in this way similar to a testimony . . . telling a story about God's help and thanking Him for what He has done. "These psalms originated as a grateful response to God for a specific act of deliverance, such as healing from illness, which may be a physical manifestation of unforgiven sin (32), deliverance from enemies (18; 92; 118; 138), or simply rescue from trouble (66:14). These psalms assume the presence of the congregation, which is gathered either for worship or for instruction (32:8–11; 34:11–14) and who hear the story of the deliverance. There are hints indicating how these psalms were used in worship: 118:19–29 assumes a procession, while 66:13–15 and 116:12–19 point to a thank offering accompanying the psalm. In Psalm 138 the worshipper is in the outer court of the temple (v 2). At the heart of these psalms is the story of the deliverance, summarized briefly, 'O Lord my God, I cried to thee for help, and thou hast healed me' and often expanded." *** (Psalms 18, 30, 32, 92, 116, 118, 138 are Thanksgiving Psalms.)

Royal Psalms

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

Liturgical Psalms

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

*Freedman, D. N. (1996, c1992). *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 6, Page 1096). New York: Doubleday.

**Anderson, Bernhard. (1983). *Out of the Depths* (195). Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.

*** Freedman, D. N. (1996, c1992). *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 5, Page 532). New York: Doubleday.

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

Lesson 1: Psalm 1	Torah
Lesson 2: Psalm 119 (selections)	Torah
Lesson 3: Psalm 73	Wisdom
Lesson 4: Psalm 95	Praise
Lesson 5: Psalm 74	Lament
Lesson 6: Psalm 84	Zion
Lesson 7: Psalm 32	Thanksgiving
Lesson 8: Psalm 116	Thanksgiving

lesson 1 - psalm 1

Psalm 1

- 1 Blessed is the man who does not
walk in the counsel of the wicked or
stand in the way of sinners or
sit in the seat of mockers.
- 2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
- 3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season and
whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers.
- 4 Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff that the wind blows away.
- 5 Therefore the wicked will not
stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
- 6 For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but
the way of the wicked will perish.

STOP: Before you continue on to these questions, make sure that you have:

- 1) Read the psalm at least twice. The second time, circle anything that seems weird or doesn't really make sense.*
- 2) Review the introduction to Hebrew poetry in the beginning of this booklet.*
- 3) Take a minute to pray and ask God to reveal His truth to you. (Take this seriously; make it more than just a "this-is-something-I-have-to-do" sort of prayer.)*

What doesn't make sense in the psalm? What's confusing?

Underline the nine key words in verse 1 (walk, counsel, wicked; and stand, way, sinners; and sit, seat, mockers). What do you think the psalmist is communicating through this list of three actions? Do you see a progression from bad to worse to worst, or is the list just the same "bad" thing repeated three different ways? How does the text support your answer?

What are the attributes of the "blessed man"?

What are the attributes of the "wicked"?

What is the "law" of the Lord? Why is it called "law"?

What does it mean to “delight” in the law of the Lord? Do we have a choice over what we delight in? In other words, can we decide what we like and what we don’t like? Explain why you feel the way you do.

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

Reread verses 1-3. Why is the picture of the tree used? Does the tree always yield fruit? Does the leaf ever wither? What clues from the text support your answer?

Why is the tree different from the chaff? Even if you don’t know what chaff is, how does the text contrast these two? (definition of chaff: the seed coverings and other debris separated from the seed in threshing grain—the worthless part of grain that is stripped away from the wheat and thrown away.)

What does this psalm teach about the future? Read verse 5 carefully, what ideas are paralleled together?

Using the teachings from the psalm, would you be considered blessed or wicked? Take an honest inventory of your heart and the way you live your life . . . where do you feel you stand?

lesson 2 - psalm 119

Psalm 119 (selections)

- 1 Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord.
- 2 Blessed are they who keep [watch over] his statutes and seek him with all their heart.
- 3 They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways.
- 4 You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed.
- 5 Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees!
- 6 Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands.
- 7 I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws.
- 8 I will obey your decrees; do not utterly forsake me.

- 9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.
- 10 I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.
- 11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.
- 12 Praise be to you, O Lord; teach me your decrees.
- 13 With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth.
- 14 I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.
- 15 I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways.
- 16 I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.

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

Wineskin in the smoke — *"as a skin bottle dried and shriveled up in smoke, so is he withered by sorrow. Wine bottles of skin used to be hung up in smoke to dry them, before the wine was put in them [Maurer]." Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.*

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Use the following chart to work through the three sections.

- a) Make a list of the actions/verbs that a blessed person ought to do
- b) Make a list of the actions or promises of God and His Word
- c) Find at least two parallels and explain their meaning
- d) Compare and contrast the overall tone in each section

Verses 1-8

Verses 9-16

Verses 81-88

Actions of a blessed person

Actions of a blessed person

Actions of a blessed

Actions/Promises of God

Actions/Promises of God

Actions/Promises of

Parallels/Meanings

Parallels/Meanings

Parallels/Meanings

Overall Tone

Overall Tone

Overall Tone

Verses 1-8

Reread verse 6. Is this a description of your life? Do you feel “shame” when you read the Bible? Should people always feel shame when they consider God’s commands? Can people read the Bible and feel good about the way they are living?

Reread verse 8. Does this last phrase seem odd to you? Explain why you feel the way you do. What’s the connection between obeying God’s ways and being forsaken by Him? Why do you think the writer makes this request?

Dig deep, consider honestly: Why do you do the good that you do? What truly motivates you to live God’s way?

Verses 9-16

Based on this passage, what are some specific markers of spiritual maturity?

How would you rate yourself on Scripture memory? Don’t settle for the “I need to memorize more” answer. What do you know? Maybe you can’t remember the verse references, but what are some things you know are true because you know they are in God’s Word?

Reread verse 15. What does it mean to meditate, to consider God's Word? Pick one phrase from Psalm 119 and meditate on it.

Verses 81-88

Reread this section. In your own words, describe the emotion portrayed here. Have you ever felt like this?

How does the person in this section relate to God's word? What are some key phrases from the text that support your answer?

Is it OK to be sad as a Christian? Is it OK for things not to be going so well? Explain why you feel the way you do.

Why are Christians so good at being fake and so bad at showing what's real?

Explain verse 88. Is the writer making a "deal" with God? Explain your answer—be sure that the text supports your response.

Use the following chart to work through the three sections:

a) Identify the overall theme for each section. Start by pulling out some key words from each paragraph. Remember, Psalm 119 is a Torah Psalm. It takes the reality of God's word and explores what God's revelation means for our lives.

b) Each section takes a slice of human experience as it stands in relation to God's Word. What's the specific human experience described in each section?

c) Write a single sentence summary for each section; write the best sentence you can. Use a pencil so you can work to perfect it.

Verses 1-8

Verses 9-16

Verses 81-88

Theme/Key Words

Theme/Key Words

Theme/Key Words

Human Experience

Human Experience

Human Experience

Sentence Summary

Sentence Summary

Sentence Summary

Have you been personally challenged by this study?

To think about:

Every time you read your Bible this week, pray Psalm 119:18:

Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.

lesson 3 - psalm 73

Psalm 73 (A Psalm of Asaph)

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

**The Message translation says: *If I'd have given in and talked like this, I would have betrayed your dear children.*

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

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

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

Is there anything in this psalm that you identify with right now in your life? What is it, and why?

Verse 13 represents a mindset that isn't true. In reality, it's never a waste of time to live a pure life. Why is this verse included in the Bible if it's not a "right" way to feel? Even if we shouldn't feel this way, sometimes we will. What's the best thing to do when we find ourselves in this condition? Look at verses 16-28 and underline the statements that helped the psalmist get out of the "verse 13" mindset.

How can God use confusion and doubt to change your life? Get personal and describe a time when God did something extraordinary in your life.

Pick a verse or phrase and meditate on it. (Put the pen and paper down.) What verse did you choose? Why? What did you learn? How were you encouraged?

What is the "antidote" or solution to the problem the psalmist was facing? What could this solution look like in your life?

lesson 4 - psalm 95

Psalm 95

- 1 Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
- 2 Let us come before him with thanksgiving
and extol him with music and song.
- 3 For the Lord is the great God,
the great King above all gods.
- 4 In his hand are the depths of the earth,
and the mountain peaks belong to him.
- 5 The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.

- 6 Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;
- 7 for he is our God
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.

- Today, if you hear his voice,
8 do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah,
as you did that day at Massah in the desert,
9 where your fathers tested and tried me,
though they had seen what I did.
- 10 For forty years I was angry with that generation;
I said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray,
and they have not known my ways."
 - 11 So I declared on oath in my anger,
"They shall never enter my rest."

Meribah and Massah – Get the background in Exodus 17:1-7

The Old Testament in the New Testament – Check out Hebrews 3:9-4:11 to see how the New Testament interprets this psalm.

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What does it mean to praise God? According to this psalm, how should a person praise God? Is this done in public or private? If both, why?

According to this psalm, why should a person praise God? What are some things people commonly praise in place of God?

Consider the last two weeks—was your life a life of praise. Why or why not?

What are some things you are thankful to God for?

How could you become more thankful? How could you cultivate gratitude in your heart?

Verses 7 and 8 give a strong warning against hardening one's heart toward God. What are some practical clues from this psalm that can help us not to have a hard heart?

Consider the condition of your heart today. Would you describe it as "hard" or "soft" toward spiritual things?

lesson 5 - psalm 74

Psalm 74

1 Why have you rejected us forever, O God?
Why does your anger smolder against the
sheep of your pasture?

2 Remember the people you purchased of old,
the tribe of your inheritance, whom you
redeemed—Mount Zion, where you dwelt.

3 Turn your steps toward these everlasting
ruins, all this destruction the enemy has
brought on the sanctuary.

4 Your foes roared in the place where you met
with us; they set up their standards as signs.

5 They behaved like men wielding axes to cut
through a thicket of trees.

6 They smashed all the carved paneling
with their axes and hatchets.

7 They burned your sanctuary to the ground;
they defiled the dwelling place of your Name.

8 They said in their hearts, "We will crush
them completely!" They burned every place
where God was worshiped in the land.

9 We are given no miraculous signs; no
prophets are left, and none of us knows how
long this will be.

10 How long will the enemy mock you, O God?
Will the foe revile your name forever?

11 Why do you hold back your hand, your right
hand? Take it from the folds of your garment
and destroy them!

12 But you, O God, are my king from of old;
you bring salvation upon the earth.

13 It was you who split open the sea by your
power; you broke the heads of the monster in
the waters.

14 It was you who crushed the heads of
Leviathan and gave him as food to the
creatures of the desert.

15 It was you who opened up springs and
streams; you dried up the ever flowing rivers.

16 The day is yours, and yours also the night;
you established the sun and moon.

17 It was you who set all the boundaries of the
earth; you made both summer and winter.

18 Remember how the enemy has mocked
you, O Lord, how foolish people have reviled
your name.

19 Do not hand over the life of your dove to
wild beasts; do not forget the lives of your
afflicted people forever.

20 Have regard for your covenant, because
haunts of violence fill the dark places of the
land.

21 Do not let the oppressed retreat in
disgrace; may the poor and needy praise your
name.

22 Rise up, O God, and defend your cause;
remember how fools mock you all day long.

23 Do not ignore the clamor of your
adversaries the uproar of your enemies, which
rises continually.

Sanctuary – God's temple

Leviathan – these verses use imagery
from other religions

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- 3) Take a minute to pray and ask God to reveal His truth to you. (Take this seriously; make it more than just a "this-is-something-I-have-to-do" sort of prayer.)*

What are some verses or phrases that stand out as particularly meaningful? Explain why.

What is confusing or difficult to understand?

The author's tone is angry, grieving. Something bad has obviously happened. What is it? (Look at verses 3-8.)

Take a look at the first question in the psalm: "Why have you rejected us forever, O God?" Who is "us" in this verse? Did God really reject them forever? How do you know? Have you ever felt like God has rejected you? If so, when? How long did you feel this way? If you have never felt like this, do you think it's because you have a close relationship with God, or because you have not always been aware/honest about your feelings toward God?

Reread verse 2. In what way did God "purchase" his people? What does the psalmist communicate here?

Verses 4-9 are nothing more than the writer telling God what has happened. If God already knows everything, is this a waste of time? Why tell God what He already knows?

Reread verse 11. It seems like the author is questioning God's way of doing things. It's almost like he is correcting God, commanding God, "Why are you doing it like this? Do this instead, God!" How do you think this prayer makes God feel? Would He rather hear this kind of prayer, or would He rather hear someone say, "God, I trust whatever you want to do." Which of those two prayers is more true to real-life human feelings? Does God value honesty in prayer?

The psalmist asks for God to destroy someone else (verse 11). Is this ever a "righteous" prayer to pray? Is it ever right to pray for someone else's destruction? Have you ever prayed for someone's destruction? Do you think that it was a righteous prayer or a sinful prayer?

Does God have hands or a garment? If not, why does the psalmist talk about these things in verse 11? Is he mistaken?

In verses 12-17 the entire tone and focus of the psalm changes. What happens? Why this shift? What does this part of the psalm have to do with the rest of the psalm? How does this section change the overall tone of the psalm?

Verses 18-23 are a series of commands that the writer makes . . . all directed toward God! (“remember,” “do not hand over,” “have regard,” “do not let,” “rise up,” “do not ignore.”) It seems like the psalmist believes that God will listen as he is telling Him to do these things, or asking these things of Him. Where does this confidence come from? Why doesn’t the psalmist feel the need to use polite phrases like, “please” or “if you would”?

In verse 19, who is the dove and who are the wild beasts? Why does the author choose to use imagery? What do his particular choices (dove, wild beast) reflect?

To think about:

It was already mentioned that verses 4-9 are the author telling God about what has gone on. Practice this kind of praying today. Talking to someone means telling them what’s going on in your life, what you’re feeling, thinking . . . what’s happening. Often times we only talk to God when we have something to ask Him or something to thank Him for. If you only talked to a friend when you wanted to ask for something or say “thank you” for something, you wouldn’t talk to that friend very often! So practice this “normal” kind of communication with God. Start by telling Him about your day today. He already knows, but He wants to hear it from you.

lesson 6 - psalm 84

Psalm 84

1 How lovely is your dwelling place,
O Lord Almighty!
2 My soul yearns, even faints,
for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh cry out
for the living God.
3 Even the sparrow has found a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may have her young—
a place near your altar,
O Lord Almighty, my King and my God.

4 Blessed are those who dwell in your house;
they are ever praising you.
5 Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
who have set their hearts on pilgrimage.
6 As they pass through the Valley of Baca,
they make it a place of springs;
the autumn rains also cover it with pools.
7 They go from strength to strength,
till each appears before God in Zion.

8 Hear my prayer, O Lord God Almighty;
listen to me, O God of Jacob.
9 Look upon our shield, O God;
look with favor on your anointed one.

10 Better is one day in your courts
than a thousand elsewhere;
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.
11 For the Lord God is a sun and shield;
the Lord bestows favor and honor;
no good thing does he withhold
from those whose walk is blameless.
12 O Lord Almighty,
blessed is the man who trusts in you.

Pilgrim – a person who passes through life as if in exile from a heavenly homeland, or in search of it or of some high goal (such as truth).

Valley of Baca – “can best be taken as a symbolic expression ‘weeping’ or ‘deep sorrow’”
Freedman, D. N. (1996, c1992). *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 1, Page 566). New York: Doubleday.

Selah

Selah

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- 3) Take a minute to pray and ask God to reveal His truth to you. (Take this seriously; make it more than just a "this-is-something-I-have-to-do" sort of prayer.)*

After reading this psalm a few times, what are some verses or phrases that stand out as particularly meaningful? Explain why.

What is confusing or difficult to understand?

What kinds of attitudes are described in this psalm? (Use specific words from the text.) Which of these attitudes are difficult for you to display in your own life? What would it take for you to "get there"?

Why does the psalmist talk about the sparrow?

What do you think it means to go from "strength to strength"?

Consider what it means to be a pilgrim. Have you ever undertaken a "pilgrimage" with your faith? How did it end up? What did you find? Is it time for you to take one? Can you honestly say you've discovered God?

For you personally, how is this psalm challenging?

How is this psalm comforting?

lesson 7 - psalm 32

PSALM 32

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

Covered - that is, no longer visible and offensive to God. Sins are forgiven by God through a sacrifice that "covers" the sin. Sometimes the Bible uses the word "atonement," which literally means covered.

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After reading this psalm a few times, what are some verses or phrases that stand out as particularly meaningful? Explain why.

What is confusing or difficult to understand?

According to this psalm, how does one achieve the blessings of God?

Why is sin (verse 1) compared with deceit (verse 2)? Aren't there other sins besides deceit? Do these verses talk about ALL KINDS of sinners, or just the sinners who are deceitful?

For you personally, what does it mean to "deal" with your sin? What are some roadblocks that hinder you from dealing with it?

Why does this passage describe physical effects that happen when a person doesn't deal with sin? Do these really happen?

When you allow sin to go "unchecked" in your life, what happens to you personally? Is there any change in your life . . . if so, what is it?

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

This psalm encourages the godly to pray while God can still be found. Obviously the part about prayer makes sense, but what about the second part? What does it mean, "while you can be found"? Since God is loving, won't we always be able to find Him?

Explain the metaphor of the horse and mule.

Considering where you stand with your faith right now, how is this psalm personally inspiring or challenging for you?

lesson 8 - psalm 116

PSALM 116

- 1 I love the Lord,
for he heard my voice;
he heard my cry for mercy.
- 2 Because he turned his ear to me,
I will call on him as long as I live.
- 3 The cords of death entangled me,
the anguish of the grave^a came upon me;
I was overcome by trouble and sorrow.
- 4 Then I called on the name of the Lord:
"O Lord, save me!"
- 5 The Lord is gracious and righteous;
our God is full of compassion.
- 6 The Lord protects the simple-hearted;
when I was in great need, he saved me.
- 7 Be at rest once more, O my soul,
for the Lord has been good to you.
- 8 For you, O Lord, have delivered
my soul from death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from stumbling,
- 9 that I may walk before the Lord
in the land of the living.
- 10 I believed; therefore^b I said,
"I am greatly afflicted."
- 11 And in my dismay I said,
"All men are liars."
- 12 How can I repay the Lord
for all his goodness to me?
- 13 I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the Lord.
- 14 I will fulfill my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all his people.
- 15 Precious in the sight of the Lord
is the death of his saints.
- 16 O Lord, truly I am your servant;
I am your servant, the son of your maidservant^c;
you have freed me from my chains.
- 17 I will sacrifice a thank offering to you
and call on the name of the Lord.
- 18 I will fulfill my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all his people,
in the courts of the house of the Lord —
in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord.^d

a Hebrew Sheol

b Or believed even when

c Or servant, your faithful son

d Hebrew Hallelu Yah

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- 3) Take a minute to pray and ask God to reveal His truth to you. (Take this seriously; make it more than just a "this-is-something-I-have-to-do" sort of prayer.)*

After reading this psalm a few times, what are some verses or phrases that stand out as particularly meaningful? Explain why.

What is confusing or difficult to understand?

What motivates this psalmist to love God?

What has God done in your life to "save" and help you?

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

What does it mean to be simple or simple-hearted (verse 6)? How does this verse help answer this question?

How can verse 7 be powerful for your life?

This passage repeats the same verse twice . . . what is it? Why is this important?

Reread verse 18. What does it mean to "fulfill your vows"? What are some clues from the text that help answer this question?

What would it mean for you to "fulfill your vows" to the Lord? Have you made any commitments to Him that you need to "make good" on?

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

Congratulations!

You've completed a short overview of the Psalms! It is my prayer that the time you spent in God's Word truly led you toward becoming a better worshiper. Here's the challenge: don't stop now. We covered eight psalms in this workbook, which means there are still 142 that you haven't read yet. Don't be overwhelmed by that, but rather look forward to learning more about who God is and how we can know Him better. My hope is that you will dive into the rest of these psalms, coming up with your own questions for reflection to answer. Or, if you haven't completed the other RootWorks Bible Studies, print them from the youth website. Whatever the case, don't stop engaging God's Word . . . it has the power to change us from the inside out!

And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to live in obedience to him. Let your roots grow down into him and draw up nourishment from him, so you will grow in faith, strong and vigorous in the truth you were taught. Let your lives overflow with thanksgiving for all he has done (Colossians 2:6-7 NLT).