1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: Psalms, Part 1
Theme: Rooted

Overview: "Texts have tunes," preacher and professor Fred Craddock said. That is especially true of Psalms, the hymnbook of the Bible. Most biblical psalms were sung or prayed. They are poetic in genre and speak to every human emotion. Psalms (the book) consists of five sections—Psalms 1–41; 42–72; 73–89; 90–106; and 107–150—which makes it similar to the five books of the Pentateuch and the five discourses of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel. The main imagery of the book of Psalms coincides with a Middle Eastern agrarian culture, and the main characteristic of Psalms is parallelism (rhetorical pattern of likeness). In October, students will learn how righteousness, reality, repentance, reason, and worship are "rooted" in God.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery.**



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

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INTRODUCTION

Authors

The book of Psalms is a collection from many writers. Nearly half of the psalms are attributed to David, "Israel's singer of songs" (2 Samuel 23:1), including Psalm 51. Others are credited to the sons of Korah (such as Psalms 42–43), Asaph, Solomon, Moses, Heman, and Ethan. Many psalms, including Psalms 1, 92, and 119, are anonymous.

Audience

The psalms were written for God's covenant people to sing, pray, and recite in worship—both in the gathered assembly at the tabernacle and temple and in personal devotion. Psalm 92, for example, is titled "A song. For the Sabbath day." The early church continued to use the psalms in worship (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).

Date

The psalms were composed over a span of close to 1,000 years, from the time of Moses (Psalm 90) through the reign of David (about 1000 BC) and on to the period after the Babylonian exile (Psalm 137). The collection was arranged in its final five-book form sometime after the return from exile.

Setting

The psalms arose from real life: David's confession after his sin with Bathsheba (Psalm 51), a worshipper's longing for the temple while far from Jerusalem (Psalms 42–43), and Sabbath worship in the house of the Lord (Psalm 92). Their imagery—trees and streams, chaff and wind, deer and waterfalls—reflects the agrarian world of ancient Israel.

Theme

The psalms call God's people to root their lives in him. The one who delights in the law of the Lord "is like a tree planted by streams of water" (Psalm 1:3). Through honest lament, heartfelt repentance, love for God's Word, and joyful praise, the psalms teach us that "you, Lord, are forever exalted" (92:8).

Why Study Psalms?

The psalms give us words for every emotion and season of life. This study calls believers to root their lives in God's righteous way, to hope in God when life seems to deny his care, to bring a broken and contrite heart to him for mercy, to meditate on his Word, and to take advantage of every opportunity to worship him.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1:	Psalm 1
WEEK 2:	Psalms 42–43
WEEK 3:	Psalm 51
WEEK 4:	Psalm 119:9-16, 89-96, 129-136
WEEK 5:	Psalm 92

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Root your life in God's righteous way.**

STUDY: Psalms, Part 1

THEME: Rooted

LESSON TEXT: Psalm 1

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Psalm 112; Revelation 20:12-15; Job 1:6-10

ROOTED IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

BY MARK SCOTT

The title of this Bible book in Hebrew means "praises." These praises can be sung, prayed, cried, chanted, or shouted. These psalms are divided into five separate sections (or books) and span a time frame of close to 1,000 years. Psalm 1, in typical Wisdom Literature fashion, contrasts the way of the wicked with the way of the righteous. Psalm 150, the final psalm, shouts praise from someone who "had a song in his heart and a pen in his hand to tell everyone what he thought about God," according to Christian minister David Erickson. Three contrasts exist in this psalm for those who are rooted in righteousness.

The Way Versus the Law

Psalm 1:1-2

At first pass *way* does not seem to contrast with *law*. But the root to the famous Hebrew word *torah* actually means "to throw or cast," as in throwing something in a certain direction. *Torah* occurs 221 times in the Old Testament and essentially means "teaching," but it is the idea of the teacher saying, "Go this way." So, the contrast here is between the wicked going one way and the righteous, being taught by the Law, going another way.

Blessed is not the normal word for praising God; rather, it is the normal word for blessing someone else, such as "goodie for you" or "happy for you." The *New International Version* takes a little liberty by translating "man" as *one* because it is the Hebrew word for male; in its largest application, it perhaps would apply to all human beings. The happy man keeps his distance from *wicked* people (as in people guilty of a crime). They are also called *sinners* and *mockers* (scoffers). Notice the progression—*walk*, *stand*, or *sit*. In other words, the person who follows the law keeps his distance from the way of the wicked.

In contrast, the righteous person *delights* (takes pleasure) in the law of the Lord. He even *meditates* (muses, groans, or mutters) on his law *day and night*. The righteous person has an emotional connection to Scripture (see Psalms 19 and 119). The righteous person does not get trapped in the steps (counsel) of the wicked or his ways, or the company he keeps.

The Tree Versus the Chaff

Psalm 1:3-4

Every significant person in the Bible is associated with a tree. (See Dr. Matthew Sleeth's *Reforesting Faith* and Shane Wood's *Between Two Trees*.) It should come as no surprise then that in this very famous beginning psalm we see a contrast between a tree and chaff. The person who follows the law of God is like a *tree planted by streams* (rivers) *of water*. This same image is seen in the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 22:1-2). Water is a precious commodity in the Middle East; quite simply, trees that get moisture produce *fruit* (offspring). Their leaves are healthy (*do not wither*—fade away or shrink). They are fruitful (*prosper*).

The wicked are not so blessed. They are like *chaff*. The chaff from plants is the disposable part. Wind can blow it away. John the Baptist used this same imagery when he described the Messiah coming and clearing his threshing floor with his winnowing fork (Matthew 3:12). The chaff does not just blow away in that instance; it is burned with an unquenchable fire. The righteous person is like a fruitful tree, but the wicked person is just striving after wind (Ecclesiastes 1:14, 17).

The Unknown Versus the Known

Psalm 1:5-6

Make no mistake about it, God is omniscient . . . he knows all. He certainly "knows" (*watches over*) the way of the righteous. When we speak of God "not" knowing someone (e.g., Matthew 7:23), we simply mean God does not recognize that person as belonging to him. He knows the *righteous* (the Hebrew word *tsad-deek*, meaning those who conform to God's standard). The wicked are not known to God as being in his family. That is why the text says, *the way of the wicked leads to destruction* (that which perishes). They are the unknown.

But the known will not have to stand in the *judgment* with the wicked. (The Hebrew word for judgment is *mish pawt*, meaning not to stand in the presence of God in the end.) The known will be part of the *assembly of the righteous*, of which no sinners will be allowed to participate. To be forever excluded from the congregation of the righteous essentially is hell (2 Thessalonians 1:9). The contrast between the wicked and the righteous could not be clearer.

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GIVING YOU A PIECE OF MY MIND

BY DAVID FAUST

What is on your mind most of the time? To be honest, I spend a lot of time thinking about food. Before criticizing me, ask yourself, *How often do I think about my next meal?*

Frustrations often fill my mind. Politicians aggravate me, TV news irritates me, and friends sometimes disappoint me. Traffic delays, supply chain problems, worker shortages, and petty bickering wear me out. I even get frustrated with myself.

Family members are constantly on my mind. Every day I think about my wife, my adult children, and my grandchildren.

I think about finances a lot, too. I try not to grumble, but sometimes I complain about the cost of living and the price of gasoline. Economic inflation leads to emotional deflation.

And I wonder about the future. What will the world be like for my grandchildren? What will America be like 20 or 30 years from now? Will churches be strong? Will Christian leaders be faithful, and will they model grace and truth?

If you think about things like food, frustrations, family, finances, and the future, you are not alone. It's natural and necessary to ponder subjects like these. But let's not forget about faith!

A Piece of God's Mind

The longest book of the Bible begins by pronouncing a blessing on the person of faith "whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night" (Psalm 1:2). Since that principle was true of God's Old Testament law, imagine how many more blessings are available in this New Testament age "for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come" (1 Corinthians 10:11).

The Bible is like a GPS that guides us in the right direction. It's a filter to help us separate wisdom from foolishness, truth from falsehood, good from bad. It's a bright flashlight when we're hiking down a dark path. It's a surgical scalpel the Great Physician uses to cut away the cancer of sin. The gospel is like a seed planted in our hearts, and God's Word is like fertilizer that helps the seed grow and bear fruit, pushing our spiritual roots deeper until we become "like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither" (Psalm 1:3).

More than giving others a piece of our mind, we need a piece of the Creator's mind.

Peace of Mind

The written Word provides a God-breathed frame of reference for all those other things we think about. *Food?* God gives us our daily bread. *Frustrations?* Cast all your cares on him. *Family?* The Scriptures reveal how to love a spouse, honor parents, raise children, and build lasting friendships. *Finances?* The Bible has much to say about money management, contentment, generosity, and caring for the poor. *The future?* "We have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16), and Christ urges us to plan and prepare but not to worry and fret.

The apostle Paul advised, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). By meditating on Scripture, you can get a piece of God's mind. "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

Personal Challenge:

List the things you think about during an ordinary day. What do the Scriptures say about these topics? How can you increase the amount of time you spend meditating on God's Word?

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. When your brain goes on autopilot, what are some of the not-too-serious things you think about? This could be while driving, doing chores, exercising, making dinner, or other times when your mind isn't engaged in "brain work." Make a list as a group.

2. Let's go one level deeper. What types of things (positive or negative) do you tend to fret about, obsess over, continue to work through, or otherwise revisit again and again?

Ask two people to read aloud **Psalm 1** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then, as a group, paraphrase verses 1 and 2, then verses 3 and 4, and then verses 5 and 6.

3. What progression do you see in verse 1?
   - What's the relationship between these actions?
   - What are some hypothetical examples of people today doing each of these three activities?

4. Apart from any kind of divine punishment or reward, why would we be blessed by avoiding the activities in verse 1?

5. Look at verses 3 and 4. Do you think you're producing more fruit or more chaff?

6. What do you learn about God from this passage?
   - What can you learn about humanity (both the righteous and the wicked)?

7. Based on what we've discussed today, what do you think you are doing well?
   - Based on what we've discussed today, what could you do differently this week?

8. How will you obey what you've learned from this passage?

9. Who needs to hear the principles from Psalm 1, and how will you tell them?

10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Psalms 42–43**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **Put your hope in God's reality when life appears to deny his care for you.**

STUDY: Psalms, Part 1

THEME: Rooted

LESSON TEXT: Psalms 42–43

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Psalm 63; 1 Peter 5:6-7; 1 Samuel 1:1-20

ROOTED IN REALITY

BY MARK SCOTT

A line from the hymn "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" says, "We should never be discouraged." Really? Is that reality in a fallen world? Discouragement comes from several fronts. The sons of Korah evidently knew that and sang about it. Psalms 42 and 43 are combined as a single psalm in many Hebrew manuscripts. The refrain that admits the reality of discouragement and yet hope in God unites the psalms (42:5, 11; 43:5). This is a *maskil*, a kind of musical notation or liturgical term.

How the Psalmist Felt

While our emotions can lie to us, they can also be very real. "Feelings" and the Psalms are inextricably linked. The psalmist behind these two psalms admitted several feelings. He felt a *longing* for God (42:1-2). This longing or spiritual thirst was as strong as the deer panting for water. The psalmist also admitted his *tears* (42:3). They flowed so strongly that they were his source of nourishment. But these tears may have been caused by mockers ("Where is your God?") and enemies (42:3, 9). This reality caused the psalmist to feel *rejected* by God himself (43:2).

In addition to these things, the psalmist admitted physical suffering ("My bones suffer mortal agony"—evidently some kind of deadly wound, 42:10). The psalmist felt *forgotten* ("Why have you forgotten me?" 42:9). All of this caused the psalmist to feel *downcast* (to bow low or bow down). He was *disturbed* (to roar or clamor). This was real. But hope in God also was (and is) real. So, the psalmist reminded himself to put his hope in God. Praising God is good therapy for overcoming discouragement.

What the Psalmist Remembered

Psalm 42

In times of deep discouragement, we must draw upon the worship of God and the love of God. The psalmist longed to meet with God. He wanted to be in Jerusalem near the tabernacle (or temple) to worship God among the *festive throng*. He longed to go to the *house of God* and experience joy and praise. The psalmist seems to have been in the Jordan Valley near Galilee. Mount Mizar is in the northernmost part of Israel (this is the Mount Hermon region). The psalmist compared his troubles to the region's waterfalls ("all your waves and breakers have swept over me"). The idiom *deep calls to deep* describes the longing in his soul.

The psalmist reminded himself of the love of God. In fact, he mentioned that special Hebrew word *chesed* in verse 8. This is God's loyal or covenantal love, or his loving-kindness. In his despair, the psalmist reminded himself of the love of God by day and God's song in his life by night. There is much spiritual therapy going on in these psalms. We must admit reality. Things hurt in a fallen world. God's hand (presence) is not as evident in the world as it was in Genesis 1–2 and as it will be in that new Eden (heaven on steroids) in Revelation 21–22. But this veil between the glories of heaven and the discouragement of earth gets thinner as we remember God and praise God.

What the Psalmist Wanted

Psalm 43

Psalm 43 helps flesh out the dilemma of Psalm 42. If Psalm 42 admits the reality of our pain, then Psalm 43 admits the reality of our victory over that pain with help from God. As he sang his song of despair, the psalmist wanted four things. Starting out, he wanted *vindication* from God. This means he wanted God to judge on his behalf or plead his case. The unfaithful nations had come at him with their criticisms and mockeries. He wanted God to contend or strive for him. As part of this vindication, the psalmist also wanted God to *rescue* him. This request meant he wanted to be delivered or helped to escape from those who are *deceitful and wicked*.

The psalmist also wanted *light* (probably referring to understanding or insight into life) and *faithful care* (probably referring to the truthfulness of God's Word). He knew God was his *stronghold* (fortified place), which is why he also wanted to worship. When we enter God's sanctuary (Psalm 73:17), we begin to see our way through our distorted views and discouragements. The psalmist wanted to go to God's *holy mountain* and to the *altar of God* (references to Jerusalem and the temple). He wanted the privilege of praise, expressing his joy and delight with the *lyre*, a musical instrument. There are troubles in this world. But more importantly, there is hope in God.

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SURVIVING A SPIRITUAL DROUGHT

BY DAVID FAUST

"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God" (Psalm 42:1). Picture a thirsty deer—exhausted, parched, huffing and puffing, literally dying for water. Does that describe the way you pant for God?

Have you ever gone through a spiritual dry spell when you feel restless and dissatisfied? You are not merely thirsting for money, sex, entertainment, or companionship. You are longing for God. Even those who love God deeply go through spiritual droughts now and then.

Signs of a Thirsty Soul

In dry times, others provide little help. Friends are too busy with their own problems to reach out, and mockers ask, "Where is your God?" (Psalm 42:3).

During a spiritual drought, you may lose the joy of worship. The psalmist "used to go to the house of God . . . with shouts of joy and praise" (v. 4). In the past you urged your family and friends, "Come on, let's go to church." But in dry times your enthusiasm wanes, and worship seems stale and lifeless.

In such times, God seems distant. The psalmist asks God, "Why have you forgotten me?" (v. 9).

Survival Strategies

What will be your survival strategy when you face a spiritual drought? How can you hydrate a dried-up soul? Psalm 42 offers help.

1. Be self-aware. When you are dry, ask why! The psalm writer conducts a spiritual interrogation, putting his soul under a spotlight and asking, "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?" (v. 5). It's good to ask, *What's going on in my soul? Is a particular habit, sin, or discouragement dragging me down?*

2. Choose to be faithful while your emotions catch up. C. S. Lewis said faith is "the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods." The psalmist tells himself, "Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God" (v. 5). Tenacious faith insists, "I'm down, but I'm not done. I'm struggling, but I'll keep serving. I'm famished, but I'm not finished. I'm tired, but I won't quit. I will yet praise him!" When dry times come, don't cheat on your spouse, blow up at your boss, give up on God, or walk out on your church. Decide to be faithful.

3. Enroll in God's school of hard knocks. "Deep calls to deep" (v. 7). Something deep within God calls to something deep within us. We learn shallow lessons in easy times, deeper lessons in hard times. In God's curriculum, hardship is a required course. In God's classroom, some lessons must be learned the hard way. Winston Churchill said, "Mountaintops inspire leaders, but valleys mature them."

You will be a better lifeguard if you know how it feels to be swamped by waves.

Psalm 42:7 compares a believer's troubles to waterfalls, waves, and breakers. Hardships often come in waves, one after another—like a waterfall pouring down. At the beginning of Psalm 42, the psalmist says he's thirsty. God answers with so much water it's hard to take it all in.

Psalm 42 ends by repeating the self-talk found in verse 5: "Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God" (v. 11). Dry times will come on this side of Heaven, but the Lord extends a gracious invitation: "Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life" (Revelation 22:17).

Personal Challenge:

Talk with a trusted friend or a Christian counselor about the current status of your soul, using questions like these: What is the level of my spiritual thirst? What is my attitude about the Lord and his church? Am I physically exhausted and need some rest? Have I been too busy and need a break? Have I been too isolated and need to spend time with others who will build me up? Where can I find resources to refresh my soul?

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How do you tend to listen to music? Radio, CDs, streaming services?
2. Think about the music you've listened to this week, and ignore musical styles or genres for a moment. What types of emotions are typically expressed in the music you hear?

We're going to treat today's passage as one continuous text. Ask one person to read aloud **Psalms 42–43** (or split the reading between two people). Then, as a group, quickly restate the highlights of the passage.

3. Imagine seeing this song in a hymnal or on a screen. What is the chorus? What are the verses?
4. What are some of the most powerful lines that express positive emotion?
    - What are the most powerful lines that express negative emotion?
5. What does the singer want?
6. In his "Application" for this week's lesson, David Faust said, "Choose to be faithful while your emotions catch up." What's one area of life where you are waiting (or need to wait) for your emotions to catch up?
7. What do you learn about God from this passage?
    - What do you learn about humanity?
8. This week, how will you obey what you've studied in Scripture?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Psalm 51**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Bring your broken and contrite heart to God for mercy.**

STUDY: Psalms, Part 1

THEME: Rooted

LESSON TEXT: Psalm 51

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 2 Samuel 12:1-20; 1 John 1:8-9; Luke 15:17-24; 18:13-14

ROOTED IN REPENTANCE

BY MARK SCOTT

What do you do with a prodigal king? You allow him the privilege of repentance. The backdrop to Psalm 51 is 2 Samuel 11–12. It was spring, when kings head off to war, but King David stayed home. In fact, he went to his balcony. From this vantage point he saw Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, bathing. He sent for her (so others knew what he was doing?) and was intimate with her. She became pregnant. David contrived a plan to bring her husband home from the war so that everyone would assume the baby was his. But Uriah, in his drunkenness, was more righteous than David in his attempted cover-up. Uriah carried his own death notice to the field of battle. Joab followed the king's order perfectly, and Uriah was killed. David received word of Uriah's death, and so he did the honorable(?) thing and married Bathsheba.

The prophet Nathan made a pastoral visit to the king and confronted him in Jerusalem's "Oval Office." When Nathan left the king, Psalm 51 was born. David was in a heap on the floor trying to restore his relationship with God. This psalm, as written in Hebrew, has 21 verses, but the English text has only 19. That is because the "superscription" (heading) may well be part of the text (though this is not always the case in other psalms with superscriptions). Verse 17 may well be the key verse to this well-worn psalm: "My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise." The God of the Bible always welcomes repentance.

Repentance Leans into the Mercy of God

Psalm 51:1-6

Convicted of his sin, David cried out for God's *mercy* (grace), *unfailing love* (loving-kindness), and *compassion* (tender love). He knew he needed these due to his *transgressions* (sins) and *iniquity* (guilt or depravity). He desired to have his sins *blotted out*, *washed away*, and *cleansed*. He knew he could do nothing to merit God's forgiveness. He acknowledged that God's kindness was leading him into repentance (Romans 2:4).

The depth of David's sin is evident in verses 3-6. He could not get away from his sin—it was *always before him*. He felt his sin was primarily against God—*against you, and you only, have I sinned*—even though he had violated Bathsheba and murdered Uriah. He understood that God's judgment on him was right and justified. He believed he must have been a terrible sinner since the day he was born (a great example of poetic exaggeration). No one is sinful at their conception, but one sometimes can feel that way. Instead, God's ways of faithfulness and wisdom should be learned in that *secret place*.

Repentance Appropriates Cleansing from God

Psalm 51:7-12

Repentance cannot pry God's forgiveness from his hand, but it can appropriate it when God wants to give it. David prayed for cleansing with *hyssop* (a plant used as a paintbrush). He wanted to be washed *whiter than snow*. He desired to hear *joy and gladness* again. He wanted his bones—crushed because of his sin—to rejoice ("dance," cf. Psalm 32:5). He was so embarrassed he asked God to "hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity."

In order to experience this, David knew God would have to *create* (as in Genesis 1:1) in him a pure heart. God would have to *renew* him. David pleaded to remain near to God (and not to be cast from God's presence, and not to have the Holy Spirit removed from him). David prayed for a restoration of joy. In this section he lived out 1 John 1:9.

Repentance Bears Fruit for God

Psalm 51:13-19

David was willing for his life to be "Exhibit A" of the grace of God. If God would forgive him, then everyone in Judea would know (*Then I will teach transgressors your ways*). David would try to persuade everyone not to take the road he took. David would bear the fruit of evangelism.

David would also bear the fruit of genuine worship. For months he worshiped God in hypocrisy. Now his worship would be clean. His *tongue*, *lips*, and *mouth* would now sing praise. His sacrifices would now be acceptable because they would be offered from a pure heart.

Some scholars think scribes added the last two verses sometime later. But are they not just saying that Jerusalem would be a different place because David had repented? The walls would be stronger, and the offerings would be acceptable. No one is beyond the call for repentance (Luke 13:1-5).

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WHY IS CONFESSION SO DIFFICULT?

BY DAVID FAUST

Some prayers are easier to say than others.

It's natural to make requests like "Help me, Lord," asking God to meet our needs and solve our problems. It's more difficult to say, "Help them, Lord," for intercession requires us to care about others unselfishly and speak to God on their behalf. Thanksgiving is a pleasant form of prayer as we say, "Thank you, Lord." Praise comes a little harder. It takes effort to concentrate on God's character and say, "Bless the Lord, oh my soul."

Confusion About Confession

For many of us, though, confession is the most difficult kind of prayer. How often do you hear honest, earnest prayers of confession in a worship service? It's hard to say, "Lord, I have done wrong. Please forgive me" (or "forgive us"). I have been in small groups where no one had a problem doing what it says in Philippians 4:6, "by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God," but when it was time for prayers of confession, everyone got silent—or cautiously raised a few issues considered safe for public mention.

Why is confession so difficult? Here are four reasons we struggle with this form of prayer.

1. Confusion: We don't understand what confession means. The Greek verb translated "confess" in the New Testament (*homologeo*) literally meant to "say the same thing" or "agree." Confession means thoughtful agreement, not whiny groveling. Positively, confession of faith means saying the same thing about Jesus as the Bible: He is the Messiah, our Savior and Lord. Negatively, confession means admitting our sins and agreeing with God's Word when we have done wrong.

2. Rationalization: We are quick to explain away our misdeeds. We struggle with confession because lack of transparency is part of the fallen human condition. Just as Adam and Eve tried to hide from God in the Garden of Eden, we offer flimsy fig-leaf excuses instead of being honest with our Creator. Embarrassed and defensive, we cover up our faults and blame others rather than admitting our shortcomings.

3. Shallow relationships: It's hard to "confess your sins to each other and pray for each other" (James 5:16) in a low-trust environment. Through his Covenant Connections ministry, Alan Ahlgrim leads in-depth small groups for church leaders. He urges them to "be honest with all, transparent with some, and vulnerable with a few." It isn't always necessary or wise to spill your guts before the whole congregation, but we all need some high-trust relationships where it's safe to be vulnerable and share our struggles.

4. Pride: We are too stubborn to come clean. The Lord blesses the poor in spirit and gives grace to the humble. The garbage truck comes to my house each Monday morning and takes the trash away. I never run after the truck shouting, "Hey, bring that stuff back!" I'm glad it's gone. Likewise, let's rejoice knowing, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Christians often talk about how "the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective," but do you remember how that verse begins? It says, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed" (James 5:16). If we want our prayers to be more powerful and effective, let's pay more attention to the challenging art of confession.

Personal Challenge:

Write your own personal paraphrase of Psalm 51, pouring out your heart in confession to God.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. This week we're talking about the difficult practice of confession. Tell us a story that happened before you were 12 years old. What's something you never got caught for that's funny in retrospect?

2. Last week we wrote "I will" statements about Psalms 42–43. What was your "I will" for last week and how did you follow through on that?

Ask two people to read aloud **Psalm 51** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to paraphrase the psalm, using as much detail as possible.

3. What does the author of this psalm want?
   - What does he think God wants?

4. In a few words, how would you summarize David's thoughts in verses 1-2? Verses 3-6? Verses 7-12? Verses 13-17? Verses 18-19?
   - How do these ideas fit together?

5. What does this passage teach us about God?
   - What does this passage teach us about ourselves?

6. Based on this passage, what's one thing you're doing well?
   - What's one thing you need to improve?

7. How will you obey what you've studied today?

8. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Psalm 119:9-16, 89-96, 129-136**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK FOUR

LESSON AIM: **Meditate on God's Word and ways in order to grow your life around him.**

STUDY: Psalms, Part 1

THEME: Rooted

LESSON TEXT: Psalm 119:9-16, 89-96, 129-136

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Psalm 119; John 17:17; Matthew 24:35; 2 Timothy 3:14-17

ROOTED IN REASON

BY MARK SCOTT

Faith takes us beyond reason, but an informed faith is a faith that reasons. Psalm 119 calls us to love God "with" our minds (i.e., using reason). This psalm is among the most incredible pieces of literature in the Bible. The complicated masterpiece is a tight acrostic; each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet (22 of them in all) begins the sections (strophes) of the psalm. And, if that is not enough, each line in that particular section (of eight verses each) begins with that letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Psalm 119 celebrates the Word (not just Scripture but the "message") of God. Many terms are employed to underline the vastness of God's message to his people (e.g., *words*, *commands*, *decrees*, *laws*, *statutes*, and *precepts*). This lesson will expound on the 2nd, 12th, and 17th letters/sections.

The Word Within Us

Psalm 119:9-16

God's Word was never intended to be left on stone tablets (Exodus 34:1). His Word was intended to be written on the heart (Deuteronomy 10:12-16; Jeremiah 31:31-34; 2 Corinthians 3:3). The psalmist acknowledged a direct connection between how much of God's Word penetrates us and what our moral fabric looks like to outsiders.

For instance, how can a person stay on the path of *purity* (clear or cleansed)? Answer: by living according to God's word. And how can a person not sin against God? Answer: by hiding God's Word in their heart. Insofar as God's people seek God with all of their heart and do not stray from his commands, they will be able to live a life of praise.

Three things are involved in internalizing God's Word. (1) *Memorization*—implanting the Word in the heart from memory keeps one from sinning. Jewish boys were not allowed to ask a question in Hebrew school if they had not memorized that day's lesson, so how much more should we memorize the text? (2) *Recitation*—recounting the law with our lips reinforces memory. Just as handwriting aids memorization more than typing, so hearing the text being read aloud and recounting the words with our lips is better than great riches. (3) *Meditation*—studying, talking, and pondering are ways to delight in the Word. Let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly (Colossians 3:16).

The Word Above Us

Psalm 119:89-96

We can rejoice that God's Word came near to us (Deuteronomy 30:14; John 1:14). But his Word also is transcendent above us. The opening line of this section says as much. God's Word is *eternal*; it *stands firm in the heavens*. God's Word is not just within his covenant people. It stands over the whole universe. God's Word (and nature) continues through all generations, is established over all the earth, and endures day by day.

But this Word that is over us also is particular to us. The psalmist recognized that he had an enemy (a theme scattered throughout this psalm) who would attempt to afflict him and destroy him. But by making the Word his *delight* (as in something pleasant) he would *preserve* (save) his life. By seeking out God's precepts and God's statutes, the psalmist was giving himself the best chance to succeed in life. The psalmist was limited as to the *perfection* (completion) he could achieve in this life, but he acknowledged that the commands of God are *boundless* (greatly broad). This Word that is within us is also over us in transcendent power.

The Word About Us

Psalm 119:129-136

The Bible does a perfect job of tying the vertical with the horizontal. The Word within and the Word over must find practical expression by moving out to others. When the Word moves out from us, people witness obedience in our lives. *Light* (knowledge) and *understanding* are then possible for people who are *simple* (foolish or naïve).

Staying hungry for the things of God (described in the text as *panting*, *longing*, and *loving*) helps keep sin from reigning in our bodies. People can witness holy behavior in us when our footsteps are directed by his Word. When God redeems us, makes his face shine upon us, and teaches us, then his decrees are on center stage for all to see. When the law is not obeyed, then the horizontal dimension of the Word is compromised. The result is that tears flow from the psalmist's eyes. We do not love our minds, but we love God with our minds. The Gospel prophet, Isaiah, said it well: "Come, now, let us *reason* together" (Isaiah 1:18, *English Standard Version*, emphasis added).

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HIDDEN IN YOUR HEART

BY DAVID FAUST

A man in Ethiopia showed me his well-worn Bible. Years ago, when his country was under communist rule, he had to keep his Bible in a secret location so it wouldn't be confiscated and destroyed.

I understand why that Christian brother hid his Bible. But why does the psalmist say, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11)? Why hide God's Word at all? Shouldn't we go public and share it every chance we get?

The Hebrew word translated "hidden" in Psalm 119:11 (*tsaphan*) not only meant to conceal or keep secret, but also to store away as a treasure. It described the way Moses' mother protected him for three months when he was a baby (Exodus 2:2-3) and Rahab hid the spies to keep them safe (Joshua 2:4). David used this word to express confidence that God has "stored up" good things for those who fear him (Psalm 31:19).

Why Hide It?

It's common to put valuables like a coin collection or expensive jewelry in a safe place. Do you keep spare cash hidden in a desk drawer, hide a house key outside your door, or store important papers and keepsakes in a safe deposit box so they won't be misplaced or stolen? We hide God's Word in our hearts, not because we're ashamed of it, but because we value it.

Sometimes we hide things until the right time to display them. Do you ever buy a birthday gift for someone and hide it until the special day arrives? Do you ever play Santa and purchase something in November but keep it hidden until Christmas Day? We hide God's Word in our hearts for the same reason cooks store spices in the pantry and mechanics keep tools in the garage—so we'll have the right resources on hand when we need them.

Memorizing Scripture today seems to be a lost art, but it's a skill we need to reclaim. If you hide Scripture in your heart, it will be available when you have surgery, reminding you that God is your refuge and strength. When a loved one dies, it will reinforce your hope and assure you that Christ is risen. When you feel lonely or discouraged, Scripture will remind you that God will never leave you or forsake you. Biblical truth will help you get along better with others, handle money wisely, and grow older with purpose and peace.

The psalmist stored up truth in his heart so that he would not sin against God. Memorized Scripture is preventative medicine. It helps us make better choices and steer away from sin.

Where to Hide It

Over the centuries, Scripture has been written on stones, on leather and papyrus scrolls, and in printed Bibles that sit on our shelves; but it's not enough merely to read or hear the words. God's truth must be internalized, digested, and hidden in our hearts. When we read Scripture or listen to teachers explain it, we should pray as the psalmist did, "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law" (Psalm 119:18).

We should pursue wisdom "and search for it as for hidden treasure" (Proverbs 2:4), treasuring God's truth in our hearts until the day comes when everything hidden will be revealed.

Personal Challenge:

Select a passage of Scripture (one verse or multiple verses) and commit it to memory. To improve your likelihood of success, get a friend to join you in this effort so you can hold each other accountable.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. When you were a kid, where did your parents hide your birthday or Christmas gifts? Where do you hide gifts now?

2. Last week, we wrote an "I will" statement about confession and repentance. How did you follow through on that?

Ask one person to read all of **Psalm 119:9-16, 89-96, 129-136** straight through out loud. Then ask other group members to each read one section at a time (preferably from different Bible versions).

3. How would you summarize these passages?

4. In verse 11, the author says he has "hidden your word in my heart." Have you memorized any Scripture, and if so, how have you found that helpful?

5. Verse 92 tells of the protective power of following God's commands. What's one instance that your life was better because you did things God's way?

6. The author shows a desire to follow God's commands. Yet nowhere does he claim he followed them perfectly. How does verse 133 give us a realistic goal in our pursuit of God?

7. Notice how passionate the writer is about the message of God. How can you grow in your passion for God and the Scriptures?

8. What do you learn about God in this passage?
    - What do you learn about yourself?

9. Based on this passage, what's one thing you're doing well?
    - What's one thing you need to improve?

10. How will you obey what you've read today?

11. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Psalm 92**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK FIVE

LESSON AIM: **Take advantage of weekly opportunities to praise and worship God.**

STUDY: Psalms, Part 1

THEME: Rooted

LESSON TEXT: Psalm 92

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 2 Chronicles 31:2-3; Psalm 36:5-6; 47:1-9; 150:1-6; Colossians 3:15-17; James 5:13-16

ROOTED IN WORSHIP

BY MARK SCOTT

Some say demons are at the heart of Halloween. But worship is at the heart of Scripture. Worship was compromised in Eden (Genesis 3:1-19). What we worship is what we become (Hosea 9:10; Romans 1:23). The angel told John to "worship God" (Revelation 22:9). The Old Testament hymnal (the book of Psalms) called God's people to worship. In fact, our lives are rooted in worship.

A significant hermeneutical construct (way to read the text) is called chiasmus. A chiasmus is a cross-shaped rhetorical pattern. If we use letters to represent sections of Psalm 92, it looks like this: A (vv. 1-5); B (vv. 6-7); C (v. 8); B (vv. 9-11); A (vv. 12-15). Verse 8, the very middle of this psalm, becomes the interpretative key, "But you, Lord, are forever exalted." This is the content at the heart of this worship psalm.

The Righteous Worship

Psalm 92:1-5

Worship of God is rooted in who God is and what he has done. God's identity and his works are praised in this section. The *praise* (or giving of thanks) for God being *Lord* and *O Most High* (identity) sometimes takes the form of music. God's *love* (loving-kindness) in the morning and his *faithfulness* (steadiness or stability) at night can be played on the *ten-stringed lyre* (like the lute) and can be enjoyed by the melody of the *harp*.

The unnamed psalmist was *glad* (rejoiced) not just because of God's identity but because of what God had done. His *deeds* were his activities in history (such as the exodus). His *hands* celebrated his miracles (such as the Red Sea and the Jordan River crossings). His *thoughts* (plans or devices) were *profound* (deep, as mentioned in Isaiah 55:8-9).

The Wicked Do Not

Psalm 92:6-7

The contrast between the righteous and the wicked is retained throughout the Wisdom Literature of the Bible. That is clearly seen in this text. These verses identify wicked people in four ways: *Senseless people* are brutish or foolish. *Fools* are simpletons or dullards. *Wicked* people are criminals or reprobates. And *evildoers* (from a root word that means "to pant," maybe in the sense of mad lust) are "workers of iniquity" (*New King James Version*).

These wicked people who refuse to worship God prove that they do not know God or understand him. They might *spring up like grass*, but they will not last. They might look like they would *flourish* (blossom or shine), but they will be *destroyed* (exterminated).

God Remains

Psalm 92:8

The Lord remains no matter what. He desires that people worship him, but his royalty is not threatened if people choose not to do so. This climactic verse announced, "But you, Lord, are forever exalted [made high]." The word *forever* can sometimes mean just "a long time," but in this passage it means "time unending." People who worship God come and people who do not worship God go, but God remains. He is consistent within himself; he exists whether people worship him or not.

The Wicked Perish

Psalm 92:9-11

Nonworshippers do not stand a chance against God. His *enemies* (foes) will *perish* (be destroyed), and the evildoers will be *scattered* (divided). In contrast, the psalmist acknowledged that God had exalted his *horn like that of a wild ox*. A horn was a symbol of power in the ancient world, so this was a victory phrase. *Fine oils* being poured out (mixed) upon this worshipper indicate his victory over his enemy and his blessed opulence.

Verse 11 is Hebrew parallelism on steroids. *Eyes* are parallel with *ears*. *Seen* is parallel with *heard*. *Defeat* is parallel with *rout*. And *adversaries* is parallel with *wicked foes*. Even in his lifetime, the psalmist had witnessed the defeat of nonworshippers.

The Righteous Flourish

Psalm 92:12-15

In this concluding section the psalmist circled back to the opening idea of the righteous praising God. Because they do, the righteous will *flourish* (bud, blossom, or break out) like a *palm tree*, and they will grow like a *cedar of Lebanon*. Palm trees made the psalmist think of Jericho. Cedars of Lebanon made the psalmist think of the logs that were floated from the north to build the temple, which is where the psalmist went next.

House of the Lord and *courts of our God* were phrases connected to the temple (which was at the heart of worship for God's people). The psalmist pretended that the trees used in the building of the temple would still bear fruit and stay fresh and green. Finally, the writer used personification by pretending that the trees in the temple would speak, "The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him." If the trees and stones cry out in praise to God (Luke 19:40), should we not do the same?

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LIFT UP YOUR VOICE AND SING!

BY DAVID FAUST

TV pop star Dick Clark called music "the soundtrack of your life." Martin Luther said, "Next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world."

I like church music that has a memorable melody, a hummable harmony, and a catchy rhythm, but I don't care for songs with repetitious words, trite tunes, or questionable doctrines. If a song pulls my stubborn heart closer to the Lord, I don't care if it's old or new. If its words are consistent with Scripture and it has a singable tune, I can use it to praise the Lord.

Long ago, a worship leader wrote a song for God's people to sing on the Sabbath day. The lyrics start with, "It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High" (Psalm 92:1). What is so good about praising God in song?

Musical Praise in the Gathered Church

Congregational singing encourages involvement. It gives everyone a voice in the service, changing us from sideline spectators and critics to active, involved performers.

Congregational singing demonstrates unity. "Corporate worship" happens when members of the body ("corpus") of Christ voice our collective praise to the Lord, literally harmonizing like a choir. Quarrels over church music create disharmony at the very time when the harmony of God's people should be most evident.

Congregational singing confesses faith. It strengthens my confidence in God when I join other believers to sing a classic hymn like "How Great Thou Art" or a newer song like the one that says, "I will look up for there is none above You; I will bow down to tell You that I need You; . . . I will look back and see that You are faithful; I look ahead believing You are able."

Congregational singing expresses emotion. Even if you love God, life is filled with ups and downs, so the book of Psalms voices a wide range of emotions. Some of these ancient songs speak of courage: "The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?" (Psalm 27:1). Others express despondency and despair: "Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck" (Psalm 69:1). Some cheerfully exhort, "Shout for joy to God, all the earth!" (Psalm 66:1). Others convey profound sorrow and loss: "By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept" (Psalm 137:1). Whatever emotions we bring with us to church, music can express our feelings and remind us that God remains constant despite our changing moods.

Musical Praise in the Morning and Evening

Music helps us proclaim God's "love in the morning" and his "faithfulness at night" (Psalm 92:2). Worship shouldn't be restricted to weekend church services, but should continue throughout the week. The psalmist reminds us to wake up in the morning praising God for his love and settle into bed at night remembering God's faithfulness.

In the "morning" of life when you are young and vigorous, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth" (Ecclesiastes 12:1). When old age moves you toward the "evening" of your life, you can still "flourish in the courts of our God" and "still bear fruit in old age" (Psalm 92:13-14). In every stage of life, God's praise should be the soundtrack.

Personal Challenge:

What are your favorite worship songs? On a piece of paper or in your personal journal, list the top 10 (or 20!) songs that help you praise God. Keep this list handy so you can incorporate these songs into your personal devotions.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. When was the last time you were so excited you felt like shouting? A sporting event? Family news? Big win at work? Something else?

2. What's one thing that has been going well in your life over the past year or so? Where are you flourishing?

Ask two people to read aloud **Psalm 92** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to paraphrase the psalm, using as much detail as possible.

3. What does the author love about God?
   - What do you love about God?

4. Verses 6-9 have some harsh things to say about those who don't follow God. We know God wants everyone to know and follow him, so how do you make sense of these verses?

5. Verse 14 says, "They will still bear fruit in old age." What fruit do you want to bear more of as time goes on?

6. What's one thing you know is true about God because of this psalm?
   - In what verse or verses do you see yourself in this psalm?

7. Based on this passage, what's one thing you're doing well?
   - What's one thing you need to improve?

8. How will you obey what you've read today?

9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: This week's lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "1717: Your Word Is Truth" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.