



1717 BIBLE STUDIES

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

OVERVIEW

Study: Psalms, Part 2

Theme: Godly Heart

Overview: If our hearts are rooted in God (October lessons), then they will be godly. November, like February, is a good month to think of "heart" matters. Having a thankful heart, especially during this month of Thanksgiving, helps us develop a godly heart. Students will learn that a godly heart seeks after God, humbles itself before God, strives to be strong and courageous for God, and gives thanks and praise to 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.

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 four of the psalms in this study (Psalms 8, 23, 27, and 63) and Psalm 131, one of the “songs of ascents.” Others, such as Psalms 100, 105, and 150, 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

David wrote some of his psalms from the Judean wilderness while running from his enemies (Psalm 63), others as a shepherd-king reflecting on God’s care (Psalm 23) and majesty in creation (Psalm 8). Psalm 131 was sung by pilgrims going up to Jerusalem, and Psalms 100 and 150 call the whole earth to enter God’s courts with praise.

Theme

God desires a godly heart in his people—a heart that seeks him (“earnestly I seek you,” Psalm 63:1), that is humble before him (“my heart is not proud,” 131:1), that is strong and courageous (“be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord,” 27:14), and that overflows with thankful praise (“enter his gates with thanksgiving,” 100:4).

Why Study Psalms?

The psalms shape the heart as well as the mind. This study calls believers to seek God’s face always, to humble themselves before him, to wait on the Lord with courage, and to give thanks and praise to God, for he is worthy—especially during the season of Thanksgiving.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1: Psalm 63:1-8; Psalm 105:1-4

WEEK 2: Psalm 8; Psalm 131

WEEK 3: Psalm 23; Psalm 27

WEEK 4: Psalm 100; Psalm 150

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always.**

STUDY: Psalms, Part 2

THEME: Godly Heart

LESSON TEXT: Psalm 63:1-8; Psalm 105:1-4

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Acts 13:22; Hebrews 11:6; James 4:7-10

A HEART THAT SEEKS GOD

BY MARK SCOTT

Seeking God and his kingdom should come first in our lives (Matthew 6:33). Seeking God should be done now while he can be found (Isaiah 55:6). Seeking him should involve the whole heart (Jeremiah 29:13). And seeking God promises great reward and his presence (James 4:8; Hebrews 11:6).

The theme of seeking God unites sections of Psalms 63 and 105. In strong parallelism and with beautiful pictures, the psalmists told us where God could be found and what that would mean for the whole world.

In the Desert

Psalm 63:1

King David might have reigned over Israel for 40 years in Hebron and Jerusalem, but he spent much time in the desert. Much of his desert ministry was spent running from King Saul and other enemies. The hot Judean wilderness is filled with rocks, sand, and often a deafening silence.

David acknowledged *God* (Elohim) as his God, and that he was *earnestly* (or “early,” as some Bible versions translate it) *seeking* him. David described this desire for God (or this *Longing for God*, as the title of J.K. Jones’s book puts it) like being *thirsty*. The barrenness of his soul mirrored the barrenness of the desert. Like a desert-bound castaway searching for a mirage, David was driven to find God.

In the Sanctuary

Psalm 63:2-5

David never saw Solomon’s temple, even though he made some provisions for it. But David did have the *sanctuary* (ark of the covenant within a tent of meeting). It was God’s sacred space on earth. David could feel God’s presence there; it was a place he enjoyed spending time. He could sense God’s *power* and *glory* there.

In the sanctuary David could feel the *love* (*chesed*, loving-kindness or loyal love). He acknowledged that God’s love was *better than life*. This inspired David to exercise spiritual gymnastics. He would lift up his *hands* and *lips* toward the heavens. He became *satisfied* (filled to the brim) deep in his soul, as if his body had experienced the *richest of foods*.

In His Bed

Psalm 63:6-8

At day’s end, maybe after being in the desert and spending time in the sanctuary, David would retire. Similar to many of us, however, he put his body to bed, but his mind would

begin to race. It ran first to the character of God. As the *watches of the night* ticked by, David was consumed with God being his *helper* (*ezrah*).

His bed became a place of singing and security. He would sing of God’s protection (*shadow of his wings*), and he would feel—figuratively, at least—upheld by God’s *right hand*. In the verses that follow (vv. 9-11) David acknowledged that some wanted to destroy him. But he knew that if he sought God with all of his heart, God would allow himself to be found.

Among the Nations

Psalm 105:1-4

David is clearly acknowledged as author of Psalm 63. But an unknown voice sang Psalm 105. God’s faithfulness to Israel was the motivation for this psalm. The final 40 verses of this psalm (vv. 5-45) describe how God cared for Israel throughout their “salvation history.” This singer’s recounting of God’s care for his people is similar to Psalm 78.

This psalm’s verbs are especially significant (*give praise, proclaim, make known, sing, tell, glory, rejoice, look, and seek*). *Give praise* means to “give thanks” or “confess.” Making God known is not a matter of private worship; rather, it is for the *nations* (literally “peoples”). Singing and giving glory are two of the best ways to advertise for God among the nations. This is more a ministry of affirmation than of interpretation. God’s deeds are described as *wonderful acts*. No doubt these are God’s redemptive deeds done in time and space, such as the exodus.

The psalmist calls upon Israel to *glory* in God’s name. The writer has “verbed” a noun (taken a word that is typically a noun and turned it into a verb). In using *glory*, the writer means the people are to praise God for his weighty presence and his shining brilliance. Before describing the history of God’s faithfulness to Israel, the psalmist called his congregation to *look to the Lord* and *seek his face*.

We consume whatever garners our attention. Our focus drives so much of our lives. When God receives our undivided attention, the natural result is to “let our lights shine for the nations.” He is, after all, not far from us, having determined our “appointed times in history” and our “boundaries” so we can seek him (Acts 17:26-27).

Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.

APPLICATION

SEEKING GOD

BY DAVID FAUST

An object's importance determines how intensely you pursue it. You might casually look for a restaurant to eat lunch, but you will search diligently for a lost pet, a misplaced diamond ring, or a missing child.

The pursuit of happiness moves us to seek comfort and convenience, treasure and pleasure, recognition and admiration. But how intense is our desire to know God?

We Seek Him

Seeking God is a *worthwhile* pursuit. What goal could be more important than to "seek the Lord while he may be found" (Isaiah 55:6)?

Seeking God ought to be a *lifelong* pursuit. David told the Lord, "I will praise you as long as I live" (Psalm 63:4).

Seeking God should be an *intentional* pursuit—a deliberate decision to "seek his face always" (Psalm 105:4).

And seeking God is a *rewarding* pursuit. "He rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

We seek God by looking for his fingerprints in nature. We can recognize the Creator's handiwork in a mountain's grandeur and a waterfall's roar . . . in vast outer space and a delicate butterfly's wing . . . in the birth of a baby and the microscopic marvels of DNA.

"God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse" (Romans 1:20).

We seek God by recognizing his image in others. If we believe every human being is made in the Creator's likeness, we will look for God's glory in human achievement, creativity, and personality.

We seek God by hearing his voice in Scripture and obeying his written Word, even when it says things we would rather not hear.

He Seeks Us

God himself is a seeker. He searched for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Jesus came like a shepherd searching for lost sheep. The Father seeks believers who will worship him in spirit and truth (John 4:23).

During a mission trip to Romania, my wife and I encountered dozens of Ukrainian refugees, including several young moms and children whose dads had to stay behind to protect their homeland.

We spoke with a Romanian minister named Mihai who, at considerable risk, was making regular trips into Ukraine to take food to families ravaged and separated by the war. During one of his visits, Mihai passed out candy to cheer up the children, but one sad-looking little boy shook his head and refused to accept it. Mihai tried to give him a toy, but the boy again refused and rejected any attempt to cheer him up. Mihai wasn't sure what to do, so he began to interact with the other children who were there.

Soon Mihai felt a tug on his pants. The boy looked up at him and asked, "Do you know where my father is?"

Mihai teared up. He told the boy, "I don't know where your father is. But I know where your heavenly Father is, and I'm going to talk to him about it. He is with you even if your daddy can't be right now."

The Father in heaven hasn't forsaken us. Long ago he promised the exiled Jews, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). Even before we sought the Lord, he was seeking us.

Personal Challenge:

Speak with an accountability partner or members of your small group; agree to seek God intentionally over the next week. Notice any ways you encounter the Lord through reading the Bible, looking at nature, or interacting with others. Jot down any "God sightings" you observe and talk about them the next time you meet.

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What satisfying moment have you had recently? (It could be a personal or professional accomplishment, time with family, a sports win, or something else.) What made it so satisfying?
2. In today's Bible reading, David tells God, "I have seen you in the sanctuary." Where have you seen God at work this week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Psalms 63:1-8** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask the same two people to do the same with **Psalms 105:1-4**. Finally, ask a third person to paraphrase both psalms, using as much detail as possible.

3. Quickly skim Psalm 63:1-8, reading only the subjects and the verbs ("I seek," "I thirst," "I sing," "I remember," etc.). What can we tell about the author by his choice of words?
4. In Psalm 63, David compared his relationship with God to three things: water in a dry land, a fine meal, and a good night's sleep. How are David's thoughts on those three things similar or different to what you feel when you think about God?
5. Read each of the first 8 verses of Psalm 63 aloud, one verse at a time. For each verse, respond, "Is this verse already true in my life, or do I want it to be true?"
6. Psalm 105:1-4 contains four different commands of how we should interact with God. Note the progression from verses 1 to 4. Why do you think it starts with the most "external" actions and moves toward the most "internal"?
7. Psalm 105:2 commands us to "tell of all [God's] wonderful acts." This is a practical verse that we can obey this week. What wonderful act has God done for you, and whom will you tell about it?
8. What's one thing you know is true about God because of these psalms?
9. What's one thing you know is true about people because of these psalms?
10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Psalms 8 and Psalm 131**. 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: **Humble yourself before
God; then he will lift you
up.**

STUDY: Psalms, Part 2

THEME: Godly Heart

LESSON TEXT: Psalm 8; Psalm 131

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Isaiah 66:1-2; Proverbs 3:34; Micah 6:8; James
4:10; Hebrews 2:6-8

A HEART THAT IS HUMBLE

BY MARK SCOTT

Psalm 8 from the first book of Psalms (chapters 1–41) and Psalm 131 from the Psalms of Ascent (120–134) can easily be juxtaposed. Psalm 8 celebrates the worth and dignity of humankind as cocreators, while Psalm 131 celebrates the humility of humankind. Psalm 8 pictures God as majestic and victorious over his enemies. Psalm 131 pictures God as a tender mother holding a child who climbs up in her lap. King David provides evidence he knew both sides of God.

Exalted Humanity/Majestic God*Psalm 8*

Psalm 8 starts and ends with identical lines. “Yahweh Adonai” is *majestic* (mighty, famous, superior) in all the earth. This majesty is displayed in the physical universe (vv. 1b, 3, 7–8). God’s *glory* (splendor) is set in the heavens. The moon and stars were finger play for God. He set them in place. He allowed humans to take care of flocks and herds, animals, birds, and fish, all of which he created.

The irony is that God chose to share his sovereignty with humans, evident by his working through the tiniest of people (i.e., *children and infants*—those who were being nursed) and through his Son, who, for a time, would be made *a little lower than the angels*. One could argue that this made God even more majestic.

Our majestic God worked through rather unimpressive things—like kids (1 Corinthians 1:26–31). Children and infants have hardly any clout. But God worked through them to establish a *stronghold* against his enemies. Since this is a psalm of David, one might think of his encounter with Goliath (1 Samuel 17). The little guy won even though his adversary had a giant advantage.

Verse 2 is stunning, especially when we consider its use in Matthew 21:15–16. Jesus cited this verse as justification for the children’s reactions to him during his “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem.

Who is the most exalted human being? Jesus, of course. The majesty of God was also revealed through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In time and space, he was made *a little lower than the angels* (i.e., during his earthly stay). The Hebrews writer referenced this text in arguing for Jesus being the “God-Man” for all humanity (Hebrews 2:9). Jesus was the best expression of God on earth (Colossians 2:9), but he also was the best expression of man on earth. Jesus was what humans were to be all the time. In fact, the phrase *a little lower*

than the angels literally means “lower than the gods [Elohim].” (See John 10:37–38.) Humans were intended by God to be like Jesus. They were *crowned . . . with glory and honor*. God intended for them to reign over creation similar to how he reigned over the universe. Humans will even judge the angels (1 Corinthians 6:3). The *New Century Version* translates Psalm 8:6a, “You put them in charge of everything you made.”

Humble Humanity/Tender God*Psalm 131*

Psalm 131 is one of the Psalms of Ascent, meaning it was to be sung by Israelites as they traveled up to Jerusalem (or maybe more specifically, as they went up to the temple mound). The closer they got to God (with his presence in the Holy of Holies in the temple) the more aware they became of their own smallness. They realized God was great and they were not.

No one can be arrogant in the presence of God. This is why David said, “My heart is not proud . . . my eyes are not haughty [raised too high or exalted].” Since God was so exalted, David did not concern himself with *great matters or things too wonderful for me*. At first pass, this might seem like David was saying he had no interest in expanding his mind or exploring the intricacies of the universe. But several passages contradict that thinking (e.g., Psalm 19:1–7; Psalm 139; and the other psalm that is part of this lesson).

David actually was saying he was content with letting God be God. David was content to just climb up into God’s lap. The image is that of a *weaned child*—a child who goes to his mother for closeness rather than nourishment. The best posture for David (and the nation of Israel) was that of *hope*. We might not understand everything in life, but we can humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord so that he can lift us up (see James 4:10).

Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.

LEARNING THE ART OF ONE-DOWNMANSHIP

BY DAVID FAUST

A Sunday school teacher told her class that God created Adam from the dust of the earth.

"You mean I'm made out of dirt?" a little boy asked.

"Well, in a sense, yes," the teacher replied.

The boy thought for a moment and said, "Mom is not going to be happy about that!"

The biblical account of creation is both ennobling and humbling. Adam was created in the image of God, but he was made from dust. Like *humus* (the dark organic matter in soil), our word *humble* comes from the Latin *humilis*, which literally means "on the ground."

We remain grounded when we pray as David did in Psalm 131:1, "My heart is not proud, Lord, my eyes are not haughty." But that's a difficult prayer because pride is a struggle for most of us.

The Errors of Arrogance

Do you ever try to one-up someone and make yourself feel superior? Have you ever engaged in a competitive conversation where, instead of listening well, everyone tried to outdo each other by telling more impressive stories of their own? One-upmanship even appears in the Bible. Remember how Jesus' apostles quarreled about who was the greatest?

Arrogant people are big on one-upmanship, for they . . .

- Put down others to make themselves look better
- Rarely apologize when they've done something wrong
- Refuse to accept constructive criticism and become angry and defensive when challenged
- Constantly seek the limelight
- Brag excessively about their accomplishments

A healthy amount of confidence is necessary to lead others, but an arrogant attitude diminishes influence and demoralizes followers. Healthy confidence relies on God; arrogance relies on self.

Confidence is the shepherd boy David saying, "In the past God helped me defeat a lion and a bear, so he will help me face Goliath" (1 Samuel 17:34-37,

paraphrased). Arrogance is King Nebuchadnezzar boasting, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" (Daniel 4:30).

Leadership specialist John Maxwell says there are two kinds of pride: "'Good pride' represents our dignity and self-respect. 'Bad pride' is the deadly sin of superiority that reeks of conceit and arrogance."

A veteran football player should be confident about his abilities, but he shouldn't act like a prima donna and disrespect the coach. Experience increases a minister's confidence, but if he preaches without praying and refuses to accept any direction from the elders, he has drifted into the danger zone of arrogance.

A Weaned Child

David described his relationship with God by saying, "But I have calmed and quieted myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content" (Psalm 131:2).

We shouldn't act like babies, whining and crying to get our way. An unweaned child views his mother as a meal ticket. She's there to meet his needs and give him milk whenever he wants it. A weaned child, though, is content simply to be at his mother's side. He begins to see his mother as someone to be loved for her own sake. Likewise, we need to move from selfishly grabbing at the Lord to walking with him in love.

In God's kingdom, we move up by moving down. We gain the world by giving it up. We find life by dying. Jesus introduces us to the humble art of "one-downmanship" where we become concerned with service more than status—loving others more than promoting ourselves.

Personal Challenge:

Using Psalm 19:12-14 and 139:23-24 as your guide, spend time in prayerful self-examination. Ask the Lord to reveal any hidden faults, secret sins, or arrogant attitudes present in your heart.

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Whom did you tell of God's wonderful acts since we last met?
2. Today we'll read about the way creation continues to demonstrate God's majesty. Where have you been struck by the amazing beauty of nature?

Ask two people to read aloud **Psalm 8** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask the same two people to do the same with **Psalm 131**. Finally, ask a third person to paraphrase both psalms, using as much detail as possible.

3. In what ways have you seen God use the weakest of things (such as children and infants, but not only those) to build a stronghold and deter his enemies?
4. Verses 3-4 talk about how small we are, while verses 5-8 talk about how much responsibility we have. This may seem counterintuitive, but it's deeply true. In what other parts of our lives do we see this relationship?
5. Psalm 131 is short but powerful. How does focusing on what's in front of you help you to calm and quiet yourself?
 - Is it easy or hard for you to just sit and be with God?
6. Taken together, what do these two psalms tell us about God?
7. What do these two psalms tell us about ourselves?
8. What is one way you can better obey the Scriptures we read today?
9. Whom will you tell about the glory and majesty of God this week?
10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Psalm 23** and **Psalm 27**. 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: **Wait in faith on the Lord; be of good courage, and he will strengthen your heart.**

STUDY: Psalms, Part 2

THEME: Godly Heart

LESSON TEXT: Psalm 23; Psalm 27

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Joshua 1:9; Hebrews 11:6, 32-36

A HEART THAT IS STRONG AND COURAGEOUS

BY MARK SCOTT

When we think about being strong and courageous, our minds of course drift to Joshua, the faithful spy and successor of Moses. As he took the baton of leadership from Moses, God reminded him more than once to be strong and courageous in leading Israel (Joshua 1:6, 7, 9, and 18). But King David also challenged Israel to be like Joshua—without naming him—and he did so in two very familiar Psalms (23 and 27).

A Heart That Is Strong and Courageous Lacks Nothing

Psalm 23

Thanksgiving week is a good time to affirm that many of us lack nothing. We have so much. And beyond that, we have a good God who acts as a shepherd and a gracious host. That is what this most famous of all psalms celebrates. At least three things make this psalm so familiar and popular. First, it pictures God as a shepherd (an image familiar to King David). Second, the psalm is used in all circumstances (including funerals). Finally, the psalm underlines David's confidence about gaining victory over his enemies and experiencing enjoyment in the presence of God.

The shepherd made sure his sheep *lacked nothing*. The verbs (*makes, leads, refreshes, guides, prepares, and anoints*, along with the implied verb, *protects*) underline the thoroughness of the shepherd to provide. Interpreting the imagery of those verbs demonstrated how the shepherd nourishes, restores, leads, honors, protects, and inspires confidence.

Green pastures are hard to come by in Israel. When the shepherd found such a pasture, he ensured that his sheep would enjoy the rest and nourishment they needed. Rushing waters from vicious rivers or flooded wadis could endanger the sheep. This shepherd ensured his sheep could safely drink and not be washed away in strong currents. Taking the *right paths* to the next feeding ground mattered in Israel. The *darkest valley* (i.e., valley of death) was a frightening valley west of Jerusalem. This shepherd led his sheep out of scary places. The *rod* and *staff* are the shepherd's tools to guide the sheep in those paths.

The shepherd of the psalm also is a host. He *prepares a table* (a most natural result of living in a shame and honor culture that cared deeply about hospitality) and shows the common courtesies of *anointing* the guest's head with oil (though David may have been thinking of Samuel anointing him as king) and making sure his *cup* is always full (another common ancient Near East custom).

David existentially felt God's *goodness and love (chesed)*. This made his desire to be in God's presence (*house of the Lord*—tabernacle and/or heaven?) all the greater. Dark valleys, evil, and enemies cannot deter David being strong and courageous for his shepherd.

A Heart That Is Strong and Courageous Is Fearless

Psalm 27

In this Psalm, David was fearless over his enemies and his troubles, fearless over his future, and bold enough to ask God for favor. God is not only a good shepherd, but he is also a *light* and a *stronghold* (fortified place). David was confident of that, so he was not fearful. In the first verse, two different words are used for fear. The first means "terrible" or "dreadful." The second (*afraid*) means "to be in awe" or "to shake."

David was fearless of his enemies (a form of the word for evil, thus *evildoers* in the *English Standard Version*). These enemies were called by other names in the psalm (*evildoers, foes, army, and false witnesses*). These enemies did everything in their power to destroy David. They *advanced* against David to *devour* him. They *besieged* (pitched a tent against) David. They brought war against David. They spouted malicious accusations (*breathed violence*) against David.

But David knew his enemies would *stumble and fall*. His heart would not fail, and David would be *confident*. Even though his enemies would surround him, David would sacrifice with *shouts of joy* and *sing and make music* to the Lord.

David also fearlessly pleaded with God for things (cf. Mark 11:24; James 1:6). More than anything, David wanted to be in God's presence (*dwell in the house of the Lord, gaze on God's beauty in God's temple, be sheltered by God in his sacred tent, and secured by him on a rock*). To be in God's presence meant to *seek his face*. David desired God to be his *helper* (a form of the name Ezra). He desired not to be *forsaken*.

The psalm ended similar to how it began—with great confidence in the goodness of the Lord in the *land of the living* (current or future?). David called his people to *wait* and be *strong* in the Lord.

Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.

THE STRANGEST VERSE IN THE 23RD PSALM

BY DAVID FAUST

The 23rd Psalm is a well-known chapter of the Bible. Ministers quote it during funerals and musicians write songs about resting in green pastures.

One part of the 23rd Psalm puzzles me, though. It's the verse that says, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies" (Psalm 23:5a). Who wants to sit at a table surrounded by enemies? How can you enjoy your food? If threatening onlookers glare at you while you eat, wouldn't that cause indigestion?

The Enemies

For the author of Psalm 23, enemies were not just a hypothetical idea. David fought opposing armies like the Philistines and imposing adversaries like Goliath. He faced unfriendly fire from foes who should have been on his side . . . like jealous King Saul, who tried to kill him, and his own sons, Absalom and Adonijah, who tried to overthrow his government.

David also faced the internal foes of his own frailties and the temptations that accompany power, pride, and position. His own lust and lies nearly ruined him.

What enemies do you face? What dangerous ideas are you trying to combat? What temptations are you struggling to resist? Are there individuals who make it difficult for you to "love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44)? Are you battling physical problems like cancer or the negative effects of aging? Do you wrestle with worry and despair?

Remember, we also contend with "spiritual forces of evil" that try to destroy our relationship with God (Ephesians 6:12). Peter warned that sinful desires "wage war against your soul" (1 Peter 2:11). On this side of heaven, God doesn't eliminate all our enemies; but in the presence of adversity, he invites us to take a breather and enjoy a meal that will strengthen us for battle.

The Table

Jesus often ate with people. He dined in the homes of new followers like Matthew, longtime friends like Mary and Martha, skeptics like Simon the Pharisee, and

seekers like Zacchaeus. Critics mocked him for eating with tax collectors and sinners, but the Lord used the dinner table as a classroom, teaching ordinary people while they did ordinary things: eating, drinking, and conversing.

After he rose from the dead, Jesus fed his disciples bread and some fish he cooked and turned their seaside breakfast into a learning opportunity (John 21:9-14). He told the lukewarm believers of Laodicea that he was eager to eat with them if they would open the door (Revelation 3:20).

Whenever the Lord prepares the meal, truth is on the table and grace is on the menu. He invites us to his table, saying, "Do this in remembrance of me." Sure, there are enemies around, glaring ominously while we rest and refuel; but they can't prevent us from enjoying what the Lord has prepared.

The Oil and the Cup

Sometimes we arrive at the table broken and bleeding, but the 23rd Psalm continues, "You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows" (Psalm 23:5b). The Good Shepherd's oil reminds us of the comforting Holy Spirit who soothes our pain and heals our wounds.

David already said, "I lack nothing" (v. 1). A few verses later he added, "my cup overflows" or "brims with blessing" (*The Message*). The Lord gives us more than a mere sip or half a cup. He supplies more blessings than we can contain or personally consume. The cup overflows so we have enough to bless our neighbors . . . and even enough to share with those enemies who have been watching us eat.

Personal Challenge:

List some "enemies" you are facing right now: people who are hard to deal with . . . physical challenges . . . emotional weaknesses and worries . . . spiritual trials and temptations. Pray about each of these "enemies," asking the Lord for courage to face them.

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Whom did you tell about God's glory and majesty last week?
2. What are you thankful for this year?

Ask two people to read aloud **Psalm 23** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask the same two people to do the same with **Psalm 27**. Finally, ask a third person to paraphrase both psalms.

3. First, look at Psalm 23 through the lens of God's protection. In the psalm, where do we see God protecting us?
4. Next, look at Psalm 23 through the lens of God's provision. In the psalm, where do we see God providing for us?
5. Psalm 27 is much more focused on God's protection than his provision. Where do you see God's protection in this psalm?
6. How has God protected you over the past year?
 - How has he provided for you?
7. What do you know is true about God by reading these two psalms?
 - What do you know is true about yourself?
8. Do you find it easy to be thankful, or does your mind go more quickly to problems?
 - What could you do to practice thankfulness this week and throughout the year?
9. For what people in your life are you particularly thankful?
 - How will you tell them that this week?
10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Psalm 100** and **Psalm 150**. 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: **Give thanks and praise
the Lord, for he is
worthy.**

STUDY: Psalms, Part 2

THEME: Godly Heart

LESSON TEXT: Psalm 100; Psalm 150

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Psalm 136; Ephesians 5:19-20

A HEART FULL OF THANKFUL PRAISE

BY MARK SCOTT

Don't put the pumpkins and pilgrims away just yet. Thanksgiving should linger into Advent. The giving of thanks and praising God should not just be seasonal. The two psalms in today's lesson will spotlight hearts full of thankful praise. The first is among several psalms dealing with singing praises to God. The second concludes book five of the Psalms and the entire Psalter in a crescendo of praise to God. The psalmists responsible for these two psalms had no problem with laryngitis. The decibel level of these psalms is off the charts. Why did the psalmists give thankful praise to God?

Because God Is God and Because God Is Good*Psalms 100*

This psalm inspired "The Old Hundredth Psalm Tune." Search for that title via the internet; you will recognize the melody. As noted previously, parallelism is a key component of Hebrew poetry. It is very evident in this psalm; verses 1 and 2 are parallel with verse 4, and verse 3 is parallel with verse 5.

This psalm went way beyond Israel. The psalmist called for *all the earth* to shout for joy to the Lord. The word *shout* was a military term calling soldiers to battle. This was followed by the verb *worship*, which could be translated "serve" . . . similar to the idea behind the English word *liturgy*. People shouted and worshiped as they made their way to the temple. So, the psalmist told his people to *enter God's gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise* (a form of the word *hallel*). At first pass, this phrase might seem to restrict this shouting and worship to Israelites, since they obviously would be the ones entering the temple. But God cast his net broadly. He desired the temple would be a place of prayer "for the nations" (Mark 11:17).

The reason for this exuberant praise was twofold. The first reason is because God is God. There is no other (1 Corinthians 8:6). He is God because he is our *maker*. Therefore, he has first dibs on us; we are *his*. We are *his people, the sheep of his pasture*. The second reason for this praise is that God is good. We learn this from our earliest days. ("God is great; God is good; let us thank him for this food.") This goodness expressed itself for us in his *love* (*chesed*—loving-kindness, loyal love) and in his *faithfulness* (stability, firmness, fidelity). Our thankful praise for God is not without cause. There are legitimate reasons for giving him praise. He is who he is, and he is good.

Because God Is Holy and Because God Is Powerful*Psalms 150*

This famous final psalm bursts forth in thankful praise. The lead line (v. 1) is the same as the tag line (v. 6): "Praise the Lord." The word *praise* is a form of the word *hallelujah*. The psalmist spoke about this call to praise the Lord in prepositional terms.

First, God is to be praised "in." He is to be praised *in his sanctuary*. This is probably a reference to the temple although the word *sanctuary* simply means "holy place." Also, God is to be praised *in his mighty heavens*. This is not the typical word for heavens. It refers to the physical expanse of the universe in the firmament.

Second, God is to be praised "for." He is to be praised *for his acts of power*. This is probably a reference to his acts in history, such as the exodus. Also, he is to be praised *for his surpassing greatness* (stoutness or magnificence)—a clear reference to his character.

Third, God is to be praised "with." This section of the psalm concerns musical instruments. *Trumpets* are ram's horns. *Harp* and *lyres* are stringed instruments. *Timbrels* are basically tambourines. *Strings* and *pipes* could refer to a number of different instruments. *Cymbals*, then and now, had to do with percussion-type instruments.

Having exhausted his prepositions, the psalmist, who had a song in his heart and a message in his hand, sat down to write out what he thought of God. His final call was all-inclusive: "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord." This call to give thanks goes beyond Israel. It is for every living thing. In the best world, the only natural response to God is thankful praise. God's goodness, holiness, and power are more than enough reasons to burst forth in thankful praise.

Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.

APPLICATION

LEARNING ABOUT WORSHIP FROM AN OLD SONGBOOK

BY DAVID FAUST

I never took a course in music theory, but I learned to sing four-part harmony as a boy in church hearing hymns and gospel songs like “The Church’s One Foundation” and “Standing on the Promises.” I absorbed the alto, tenor, bass, and melody lines while looking forward to the meal warming in the oven that our family would devour when we finally got home from church.

My brothers and I loved sports, so we weren’t thrilled when our parents decided we should take piano lessons. We learned the basics, but we didn’t practice very much, and Mom and Dad didn’t want to waste the \$1.00 per person it cost back then for our half-hour lessons. Soon the piano lessons ended, and instead of the scales and classical pieces our teacher assigned, we now could play whatever we wanted—and that’s when I started to enjoy playing the piano.

I imitated popular songs I heard on the radio, made up songs of my own, and sometimes played songs I found in the hymnal, *Great Songs of the Church*, that we used on Sundays. My favorite was number 322—“At Calvary”—because it was in the key of C and easy to play.

In biblical times, Jewish boys and girls soaked up the music they heard in the temple. Their families used an old songbook that’s still in print today: the book of Psalms. We can learn several practical lessons about worship from two of these ancient songs (Psalms 100 and 150).

Why Do We Worship?

God created us. “It is he who made us” (Psalm 100:3). He is perfect, consistent, and reliable. “The Lord is good” (100:5). “His faithfulness continues through all generations” (100:5). He has performed mighty deeds. “Praise him for his acts of power” (Psalm 150:2). He deserves our highest honor and recognition. “Praise him for his surpassing greatness” (150:2).

How Do We Worship?

Worship shouldn’t be boring. The Psalms tell us to worship enthusiastically, cheerfully, and gratefully. “Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth” (100:1). “Worship the Lord with gladness” (100:2). “Give thanks to him and praise his name” (100:4).

We can worship the Lord with a variety of music. “Come before him with joyful songs” (100:2). According to Psalm 150:3-5, the Hebrews praised God with physical

movement (dancing), wind instruments (horns and pipes), stringed instruments (harps and lyres), and rhythm instruments (tambourines and cymbals).

Musical styles and tastes change with the times, but in any culture the goal of church music should be to glorify God and express our love for him, not merely to fill time in the service or entertain the crowd. Does your church’s music help you come before the Lord “with joyful songs”? Does it encourage unity, or division and frustration?

Where Do We Worship?

We can praise God anywhere, but aren’t you thankful for special places set apart for the worship of God? “Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise” (100:4). “Praise God in his sanctuary” (150:1).

Eventually we will join the angels and worship the Lord in the heavenly places. “Praise him in his mighty heavens” (150:1).

When Do We Worship?

As long as we live. “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord” (150:6). And even when we stop breathing, we can join the never-ending, awe-inspiring worship service in the heavenly realms. That old Hebrew songbook assures us, “his love endures forever” (100:5).

Author’s Note: Many older readers of *Christian Standard* and *The Lookout* may remember *Great Songs of the Church*, which Standard Publishing first printed and offered for sale in 1937. The hymnal’s Foreword called it “probably the costliest collection of great religious copyrights ever assembled in a single volume.” When he renewed the copyright in 1965, compiler E. L. Jorgenson included this note at the end of the Foreword: “And now, in profoundest adoration and gratitude, the work is again committed to the care of Him whose we are and whom we serve—Christ Jesus, the Lord.”

Personal Challenge:

What do you appreciate most about God? Say a prayer of praise, expressing your love for the Lord and your gratitude for his blessings.

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Whom did you tell how thankful you are for them over the last week?
2. Tell us about your Thanksgiving. Whom did you see? What did you eat? What did you do?
 - Thanksgiving week isn't quite over, so let's spend a little more time being thankful. How have you experienced God's faithfulness over the past year?

Ask two people to read aloud **Psalm 100** and **Psalm 150** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to paraphrase both psalms in as much detail as possible.

3. The first three verses of Psalm 100 give three ways to worship God. What are they?
 - Which one of these ways to worship is easiest for you and which is hardest?
4. Psalm 150 provides an interesting progression of praise. First we're told to praise God "in" certain places. What are those places?
 - Then we're told to praise God "for" certain things. What things?
 - And then we're told to praise God "with" certain things. What things?
5. If you were writing your own psalm, what would be your "in"? Where is your sanctuary?
 - What would be your "for"? What are the attributes that you praise?
 - What is your "with"? What things can you do to praise God?
6. What do we know is true about God by reading these two psalms?
7. What do we know is true about ourselves?
8. What would you need to change in your life to give more glory and praise to God?
9. Whom will you tell about God's praiseworthiness this week?
10. 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.