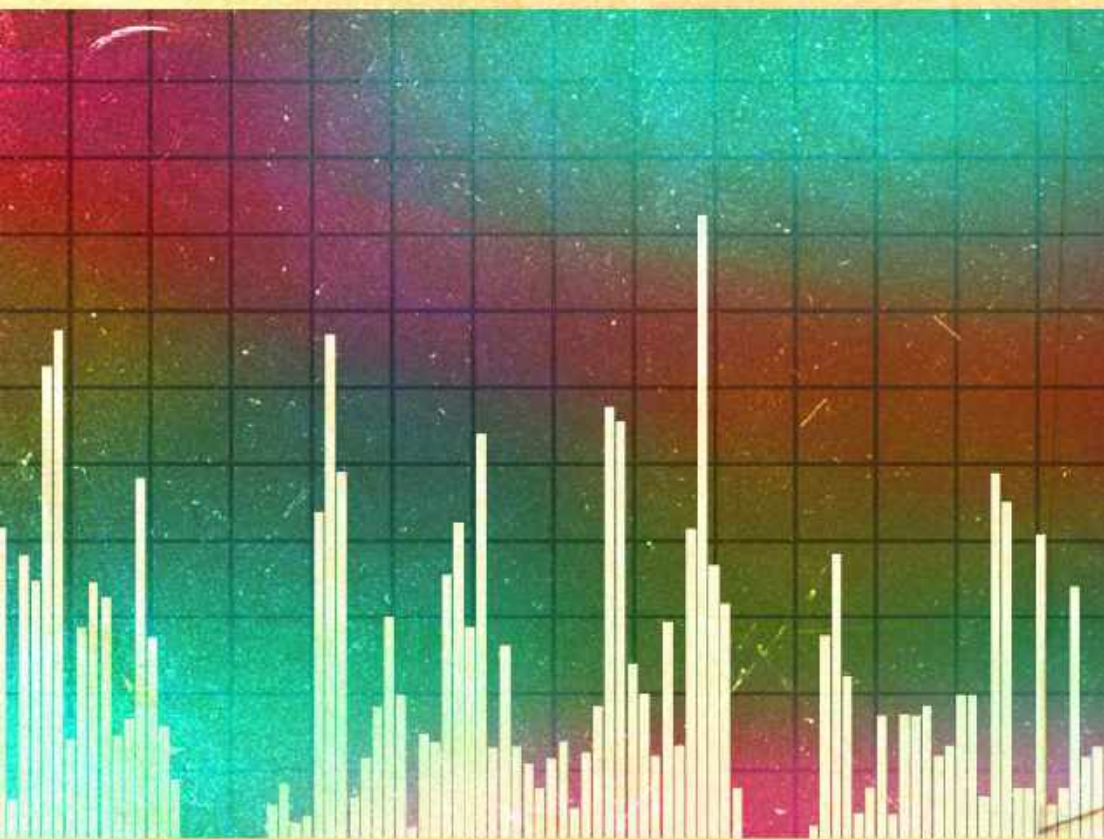




FULL SPECTRUM



A STUDY ON THE BOOK OF PSALMS

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NOTES

WELCOME

At The Crossing, we fully believe that God speaks to us through the Bible and uses it to transform our hearts, lives, and relationships. Our team has developed this study with the hope that you will read the Bible and experience the life changing ways of Jesus through it.

This study was born as a companion to our “Full Spectrum” sermon series, as a way to learn more on your own or in a small group.

READ

The study is divided into five days of reading per week: four days include a reading of a psalm and the fifth day. Is a time of intentional pause and reflection (Selah).

REFLECT

After completing each day’s reading, you will have the opportunity to reflect upon what you read through engaging questions and spiritual practices to try.

PRAY

We have included prayer prompts each day to help you grow in your practice of both communicating with and listening to God.

SELAH

Selah is a Hebrew word found throughout the book of Psalms and used elsewhere in Hebrew poems and song compositions of the day. Bible scholars have considered that it is most likely providing an opportunity for the person of faith to slow down, pause, and reflect. In each week of this study, we have titled the fifth day *Selah*, where we will have the opportunity to pause and more deeply reflect on that week’s theme.

CONNECT

We have found that this study is best done in community, where you can discuss what you’ve been learning. Invite a friend to do it with you or participate in a small group at The Crossing. Here, at The Crossing, we organize small groups around life-stages and commonalities so that everyone connects easily. Go to www.thecrossing.com/groups for more info.

Our prayer is that this resource will help you explore your faith and experience the life-changing ways of Jesus, wherever you are in your spiritual journey.

INTRODUCTION TO PSALMS

The overarching message of Psalms is that with God, every part of you is welcome. Our anxiety and grief, our anger and envy, our thanksgiving and praise all have a place in the life of a person of faith. The more we learn to sit with our own emotions, the more our capacity grows to offer support and care to others.

In her book, *Prayer in the Night*, author Tish Harrison Warren writes: “The Psalms were the church’s first prayer book ... By praying the Psalms year after year for millennia, in nearly every language and place on earth, the church learns to remain alive to every uncomfortable and complex human emotion. We learn to celebrate and we learn to lament ... Prayer invites us to bring our whole selves—in all our glorious complexity—to God, who knows us better than we ever will.”

STUDY OVERVIEW

We have divided our study into five weeks, with each week covering a different category of emotions.

WEEK ONE: THE GRAND & TRANSCENDENT FEELINGS

Psalms that describe what it’s like when we encounter how big, beautiful, and not like us God is.

WEEK TWO: THE DEEP & DARK FEELINGS

Psalms that shed light on the secret thoughts and feelings we have about ourselves and others that most of us would rather hide.

WEEK THREE: THE CALM & GROUNDED FEELINGS

Psalms that explore what it looks like to internalize the peace, care, and stability that comes from having a relationship with God.

WEEK FOUR: THE SORROWFUL & HEARTBREAKING FEELINGS

Psalms that give voice to some of the most painful aspects of the human experience and explore what it is like to bring these feelings into God’s presence as an act of worship.

WEEK FIVE: THE BRIGHT & BUBBLY FEELINGS

Psalms that give us language for joy, gratitude, and connection to God and others.

ORGANIZATION & GENRE

The book of Psalms is a collection of 150 Hebrew poems compiled for the purpose of being utilized by the people of Israel in worship. It contains several subcategories of themes, structure, and tone that are divided into five books:

Book I: Psalms 1-41

Book II: Psalms 42-72

Book III: Psalms 73-89

Book IV: Psalms 90-106

Book V: Psalms 107-150

This study will cover the following genres:

HYMNS OF PRAISE

Psalms that provide an invitation to offer praise and devotion to God. These psalms focus upon attributes of God's character and the wonders of God's creation.

LAMENTS

Psalms that arise from a place of internal crisis in the life of an individual or a community. These psalms contain raw, unedited emotions and crying out to God for help. Most psalms of lament contain a shift of emotion that results in a positive conclusion.

WISDOM PSALMS

Psalms that offer insight, invitation, and practical guidance for the life of faith. These psalms contain attributes that are similar to other "wisdom literature" we find in the Old Testament (e.g. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes).

THANKSGIVING PSALMS

Psalms that tell the story of God's deliverance and intervention and express gratitude to God.

AUTHORS

The Book of Psalms is composed by a variety of authors, some attributed to a specific author, and some anonymous.

Commentator Walter Brueggemann explains that it is possible that psalms attributed to a specific person may not have been written by them, but rather dedicated to them by another author. Over the course of our study, we will read psalms written by the following authors:

DAVID

David, the courageous, giant-defeating shepherd-turned-king is the most well-known and prolific psalmist—73 of the 150 psalms recorded in the Bible are attributed to him. He is known both for his sincere devotion to God, as well as his epic failures. His writing provides a model to demonstrate what it is like to bring our full emotional experience into God's presence. David's story is recorded in the Old Testament books of 1 and 2 Samuel.

THE SONS OF KORAH

Authorship for Psalms 42-49, 84-85, and 87-88 is attributed to the Sons of Korah, also known as the Korahites. We are introduced to Korah in the Old Testament books of 1 and 2 Chronicles, where we learn "Korah was a Levite and leader of the guild of psalmists" (Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*). Some psalms within this collection are attributed to a particular author.

ASAPH

Authorship for Psalms 73-83 is attributed to Asaph. The Bible does not provide much information about Asaph's background, but he is designated as a temple singer.

WEEK ONE

THE GRAND & TRANSCENDENT FEELINGS

“When we are stunned beyond words, when an aspect of life takes us away from being able to chip away at something until it’s down to a manageable size and then to file it nicely away, when all we can say in response is ‘Wow,’ that’s a prayer.” — Anne Lamott

As we begin our study, we will be spending our first week exploring psalms that express the grand and transcendent parts of the human experience—the feelings that cause us to acknowledge how vast and intentionally designed our world is, how big and other God is, and how small we are in comparison.

WEEK 1 DAY 1: PSALM 46 (REVERENCE)

AUTHOR: THE SONS OF KORAH - GENRE: HYMN OF PRAISE

Reverence is not a common expression in our Western, highly individualistic culture. It brings to mind images of royalty—showing respect and honor to someone who has been positioned in a place of authority. Regardless of your personal opinion of human leadership, God is ultimately deserving of our reverence—not because God needs or demands to be worshiped and upheld by us, but because when we experience God for who he truly is, reverence naturally overflows.

Author Michael Card writes that “the central issue of worship [is the question]: What is God worth? In fact, the first primitive form of the word was *worth-ship*.” When we engage in the act of showing respect, honor, and devotion to God, we do so because we believe he is *worth* it.

Our reading today explores several reasons why God is worthy of our reverence:

- God provides help in times of trouble (46:1, 5)
- God is powerful—over and above any existing human power (46:6)
- God has acted on behalf of his people throughout history, causing wars to cease (46:8-9)

NOTE:

This psalm contrasts the strength and power of God with the threat of a natural disaster. This imagery serves as reassurance to the reader that, because of God’s power over creation, we can have courage amidst the challenges we face in the world. (Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*)

READ: PSALM 46



REFLECT:

1) What are some of your personal life experiences that have led you to believe God is worthy of your reverence?

2) What experiences have made showing reverence or offering worship to God challenging for you?

3) Which of the three aspects of God’s character resonate most with you today as you read: God providing help in times of trouble, God’s power, or how God has acted on behalf of his people throughout history?

PRAY:

Use your response to question 3 to write a prayer of praise for how God has personally impacted your life.

WEEK 1 DAY 2: PSALM 8 (WONDER)

AUTHOR: DAVID - GENRE: HYMN OF PRAISE, CREATION

“Wonder takes our breath away, and makes room for new breath.
That’s why they call it breathtaking.” – Anne Lamott

Wonder is a feeling most of us wish we experienced more of, and requires us to slow down enough to pay attention. In order to help our hearts slow down a bit today, we are going to break down this emotion into an acronym:

WATCHFUL: Wonder begins with an attitude of being watchful. Life feels different when we are on the lookout for the movement of God.

OBSERVANT: Wonder also involves being observant. This posture goes beyond simply looking at the things around us, but really taking them in and noticing details like color, texture, scent, sound, and taste.

NOT HURRIED: Those who live in wonder are not hurried. To live without hurry is to be interruptible and to have enough margin in our lives that, when something interesting or beautiful crosses our path, there is time to stop and notice it.

DELIGHT-SEEKING: Wonder is fueled by delight-seeking—collecting experiences of goodness and receiving them as gifts from God.

EAGER: Like a child who wants to know everything about everything, wonder is eager—desiring to take in as much beauty and goodness as we can.

RELISHES: Finally, wonder relishes. This involves allowing ourselves to linger in a place of enjoyment. It’s staying a little longer when that inner voice inside is pressing us to move forward with our day and be productive.

If any of these things sounds a little childlike, it’s because they are. Wonder comes naturally to most kids—they seem to wake up with the expectation that they will be delighted and surprised by life. In the New Testament, Jesus says, “Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it” (Mark 10:15, Luke 18:17).



NOTE:

This Psalm is an example of an envelope structure, beginning and ending with the same theme. (Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*)

READ: PSALM 8

REFLECT:

1) When you look at the acronym for wonder, which of the aspects come naturally to you? Which do you find more difficult?

2) What aspects of wonder do you notice in today's reading?

3) What are some practical ways that you could incorporate more wonder into your life this week?

WEEK 1 DAY 3: PSALM 19 (AWE)

AUTHOR: DAVID • GENRE: HYMN OF PRAISE, CREATION

“Gorgeous, amazing things come into our lives when we are paying attention.” — Anne Lamott, (*Help, Thanks, Wow*)

If wonder is what we experience when we marvel at small details, awe is what we feel when we are overtaken by the big things—moments when we are amazed at how truly big God is, how infinitely vast God’s creation is, and how small we are in comparison.

Psalm 19 provides us with beautiful language for the experience of awe. The first half of the psalm explores the awe-inspiring, richly beautiful nature of creation and how its very existence offers unspoken praise to God. The remainder of the psalm explores attributes of God’s spoken word through Scripture, referred to in this psalm as God’s *law*, *statutes*, and *precepts*. Both God’s world and God’s words can lead us toward an experience of amazement and adoration of who God is.

NOTE:

This psalm explores how God’s creation of the sun gives light, just as God’s instruction also gives light and direction to our lives.
(Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*)

READ: PSALM 19

REFLECT:

1) What aspects of creation stir up feelings of awe for you?

2) As you think about this part of creation, what do you think it reveals about who God is?

3) What Scripture passages provide you with a special sense of comfort or connection to God?

PRAY:

As you reflect upon the vastness of creation—oceans, sunrises, sunsets, galaxies, stars, etc. —write out a prayer of praise to God.

WEEK 1 DAY 4: PSALMS 145 (PRAISE)

AUTHOR: DAVID • GENRE: HYMN OF PRAISE, GENERAL HYMN

Similar to our discussion about reverence, praise involves both identifying and verbalizing the positive traits and actions of another. Praise can be an individual and highly personal expression, or can be offered on the behalf of an entire community. In the first half of our reading today (Psalm 145:1-7), the psalmist flows in and out of both personal (statements that begin with “I”) and communal (statements that begin with “they”) expressions of praise. The second half of the psalm (Psalm 145:8-21) focuses upon specific character traits of God—gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, rich in love, and more.

Since our praise is rooted in who God is, we can find ways to express praise in any circumstance. When we’re in a season where praise just feels impossible, we can rest in God’s compassion and grace—knowing that he does not demand our praise or want us to manufacture false joy.

NOTE:

Psalm 145 is actually an acrostic poem in its original language, which involves utilizing each letter of the Hebrew alphabet to start each line of the poem. (Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*)

READ: PSALM 145

REFLECT:

1) What do you notice about the expressions of praise in this psalm (“I” statements and “they” statements)?

2) When in your life have you found it difficult to praise God? When does it come more naturally?

3) What qualities of God stood out to you the most as you read today? How have you personally experienced them in your life?

PRAY:

Use your response to question 3 to write a prayer of praise for how God has shown up in your life.

PAUSE

WEEK 1 DAY 5: SELAH

Oftentimes, after an especially good meal, we want to linger. We lean back in our chairs and think—maybe even say out loud— “Wow, that was so good.” The Hebrew word *selah* is sprinkled throughout the book of Psalms and, while we do not know its exact meaning, it has been long understood as a reminder to pause, reflect, and allow the reader to fully take in what they just read. In the same way, we want you to take some additional time to reflect on what you read this week, the insights and emotions you may have experienced, and any adjustments or commitments you plan to make.

This is your time to pause. We encourage you to do the following to maximize your time:

PREP:

Set Up: Take a few moments to arrange your environment for listening and reflection. If you’re the kind of person who needs to move a bit before you can be still, take a 5-10 minute walk first. You can also make some coffee or tea, light a candle, get cozy in your favorite chair, or whatever else you need to prepare your heart for a time of reflection.

Pray: Take a moment to ask God to quiet your mind and allow for clarity as you reflect on this week’s study.

Capture: Have a journal ready (paper, tablet, phone, or computer) to write down your responses to the following questions along with any associated thoughts that may follow.

PAUSE:

In your life (especially these last 4 days) when have you experienced the “grand and transcendent” feelings as described throughout this week’s study? What typically brings about these feelings?

Are these feelings comfortable and welcome for you or do they feel awkward?

When you have them, how does that experience affect your relationship with God? In what ways specifically?

Remembering that community is so important and is so close to God’s heart for us, sharing these experiences with others can be useful for improved closeness and bonding in those relationships. Who can you share your experiences with this week?

Think about the Scriptures you read this week. What are 1-2 verses that stood out to you this week and why?

PRAY:

Close your time in prayer, asking God to solidify what you learned in your mind, heart, and actions.

WEEK 1



NOTES



WEEK 2

THE DEEP & DARK FEELINGS

This week, we will be focusing on the deeper, darker emotions we all experience—some that we might all prefer didn't exist at all because they have the propensity to bring out the worst of us.

Making mistakes, disappointing others, and living in light of our flaws and imperfections is difficult for many of us to tolerate. If this is hard in our human relationships, it can understandably be even more difficult to face the reality of disappointing God.

As we focus upon these shameful and often secret aspects of being human, our hope is that we not simply focus on behavior patterns that need to change, but also to accept the invitation to engage these parts of ourselves with the same perspective God does—with curiosity and compassion. Here, we have the opportunity to access the type of healing that produces real and lasting change as we expose and heal the false beliefs that continually remind us of our failures and work to convince us that we are disqualified from the love of God.

Macrina Wiederkehr, spiritual director and author, writes:

“There is no freedom
like seeing myself as I am
and not losing heart.
There is no freedom
like looking at myself as I am
and saying, “Yes, that’s me!”
There is no freedom
like taking myself in my arms.
Only in that embrace
will I experience healing.
Only in that embrace
will I come to know my true self.”

WEEK 2 DAY 1: PSALM 51 (GUILT)

AUTHOR: DAVID • GENRE: INDIVIDUAL LAMENT

Psalm 51 is one of the most raw and vulnerable confessions in the entire Bible, containing the honest words of a person on perhaps the very worst day of his life. The events that inspire this psalm are nothing short of a scandal—David abused the power afforded to him as king to demand a sexual encounter with a married woman named Bathsheba, who as a result, became pregnant. David then concocted a plan to cover his actions by arranging for Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah, to come home from battle, hoping that he would then assume the child was his. When this plan failed, David ordered Uriah to be placed at the front lines to be killed so he would be free to marry Bathsheba.

The words of this psalm provide a great example of *guilt*—the uncomfortable emotion we experience when we do not live in accordance with our values and beliefs. The proper response to guilt is to genuinely experience sorrow over the harm we have caused, to honestly admit our wrongdoing, and seek repair with the person we have wounded.

In this psalm, David acknowledges how his actions have damaged his relationship with God. He distinguishes between genuine grief over the pain he has caused versus a performative apology that may use the right words, but lack true action and change.

One of the most interesting things about this psalm is how David begins his prayer. He writes, “Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins” (Psalm 51:1). Here, we see that David’s confession is rooted in the knowledge that two seemingly contradictory realities can be true at once—that he has sinned and gravely fallen short of how a person of faith should live *and* that he is still counting on the unfailing love and grace of God.

NOTE:

This psalm contrasts three aspects of God’s character (mercy, unfailing love, compassion) with three aspects of human inadequacy (sin, transgression, iniquity). (Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*)

READ: PSALM 51

REFLECT:

1) What is a recent experience of guilt in your life?

2) How do you typically handle mistakes in your relationships? Do you find it hard or easy to admit wrongdoing and seek repair?

3) This psalm explores the idea that how we engage in our relationships with others may negatively impact our relationship with God. What do you think about that idea?

PRAY:

Spend some time reflecting upon how you have fallen short of living according to your own beliefs and values this week. Spend some time in prayer today, asking God for the courage to repair relationships where you have caused harm.

WEEK 2 DAY 2: PSALM 38 (SHAME)

AUTHOR: DAVID • GENRE: INDIVIDUAL LAMENT

In today's reading, we will explore the concept of *shame*—an emotion that is often used interchangeably with guilt, but has some distinct differences. While guilt involves uncomfortable feelings associated with something we have *done*, shame involves the overwhelming negative feelings associated with *who we are*.

Many of us carry *shame* from our early life experiences (e.g. our families of origin, bullying, a painful romantic relationship) that create beliefs inside that we are bad, deeply flawed, or unworthy of love. If these are the messages we receive from the people in our lives closest to us, it might be easy to presume that God responds to us in the same way.

As we consider the nuances between the feelings of *guilt* and *shame*, Psalm 38 illustrates some helpful ways for us to identify if we're experiencing shame:

ELEMENTS OF SHAME:

1. God feels angry, punishing, silent, or absent
2. We experience physical discomfort
3. We experience emotional overwhelm
4. We feel disconnected and/or rejected by loved ones
5. We feel the need to excessively apologize to God and/or others in order to regain their love and favor

As we explored in Day 1, the antidote for guilt is repair. The antidote for shame is compassionate connection. When we are caught in the throes of shame, what we need most is for someone to move toward us in love.

NOTE:

This psalm wrestles with the idea that suffering occurs as a result of sin in our lives. This is a topic that continues to be debated in faith communities today. (Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*)

READ: PSALM 38

REFLECT:

1) As you read Psalm 38, what aspects of shame do you notice David expressing?

2) As you look at the list of elements of shame, which do you experience the most in your life?

3) When have you experienced compassionate connection during a time you felt ashamed? What might it look like to show this to others?

PRAY:

Reflect on some recent experiences of shame in your life. Spend some time in prayer, asking that God would help you experience his acceptance and love.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE
“Am I Wounded or Am I Sinful” Podcast



WEEK 2 DAY 3: PSALM 73 (ENVY)

AUTHOR: ASAPH • GENRE: WISDOM

Envy is a tricky emotion—one that most of us might rather pretend we don't experience. Dan Allender and Tremper Longman define envy as "the desire for what another has that we don't have." (Dan Allender and Tremper Longman, *Cry of the Soul*).

If we allow ourselves to experience curiosity toward our envy, there is a lot we can learn. First, our envy often reveals places in us that need healing. For example, it's common to feel envious of someone who seems to have a close, connected group of friends. Perhaps this person is always posting pictures on social media of their "tribe," while you're feeling disconnected and alone. Instead of criticizing ourselves for feeling this way, we could ask ourselves some questions about why this particular thing feels so painful for us. Feelings of disconnection from others are often rooted in past experiences of feeling excluded or not feeling a sense of belonging in one's family of origin or social circles.

Another common experience is feeling envious of the success others "in our lane" have achieved (similar age, profession, etc.). On the surface, we often feel bad for thinking so negatively about someone else, perhaps someone we don't even know. Instead of stuffing these feelings, we might find that our envy might actually be pointing us toward something that we have a desire or dream to accomplish ourselves (for example: start a business, go back to school, write a book, take a leap into a new profession, etc.).

As we look at both of these examples, we find that there is almost always something deeper beneath our envy if we allow ourselves to lean in. When we simply try to cut off these feelings without first exploring them, we could miss the healing or potential next steps that God might have for us.

NOTE:

This psalm contrasts the life of obedience to God with the life of self-focus. (Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*)

READ: PSALM 73

REFLECT:

1) When has your experience of envy pointed you toward something in your life or personal story that needs healing?

2) What current experiences of envy might be pointing you toward something that you desire to accomplish?

3) Have you ever considered viewing envy through this lens? How does looking at envy this way impact how you view this emotion?

PRAY:

Reflect on a recent experience of feeling envious of someone else. Spend some time in prayer, asking God to bring to light any places in your story that might need healing or desires that God might be asking you to step into.

WEEK 2 DAY 4: PSALM 35 (ANGER)

AUTHOR: DAVID • GENRE: INDIVIDUAL LAMENT

When dealing with darker emotions, it can be easy to categorize them as “good” and “bad,” or the ones we should feel and the ones we shouldn’t. As people of faith, anger feels like one of the bad emotions we shouldn’t have.

In her book *Atlas of the Heart*, Brené Brown defines anger as “an emotion that we feel when something gets in the way of a desired outcome or when we believe there’s a violation of the way things should be.”

Anger is a messy and complex emotion. Anger is often a helpful signal that our boundaries are being violated or that we are nearing burnout. It can also be deeply rooted in justice—demanding accountability from those who perpetrate abuse and harm. Anger also has a dark side. Sometimes we experience a desire for revenge, also referred to as *schadenfreude* (pronounced *sha-din-froy-da*), a German word that means deriving “pleasure or joy from someone else’s suffering or misfortune” (Brené Brown, *Atlas of the Heart*).

In our reading today, we will explore a psalm that is classified as an *imprecatory* psalm—characterized by themes of vengeance and a call for God to inflict judgment or punishment on one’s enemies. One of the beautiful things about the Bible is that even the emotions that we wished we never felt, have a place. If God included the experience of anger and *schadenfreude* in the Bible, that means there is safety to explore it when it pops up in our lives.

NOTE:

Another way of thinking about imprecatory psalms (see above paragraph for a reminder of the definition) is to consider them as a passionate cry to God that evil will not have the final say. (Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*)

READ: PSALM 35

REFLECT:

1) When in your life have you experienced anger as a signal that you need to adjust your boundaries or that you need to take better care of yourself?

2) When have you experienced the “darker side” of anger?

3) What is your relationship with anger? How might you approach anger differently?

PRAY:

As you reflect upon your relationship with anger or resentment, ask God to help make clear boundaries in your life or ways that you may need to practice more consistent self-care.

PAUSE

WEEK 2 DAY 5: SELAH

Remember playing hide and seek as a child with your neighborhood friends? The goals of the game were simple: (1) pick the best hiding spot possible and (2) be the last one found. Being found early was always a let down—often bringing feelings of being exposed for not picking the most strategic hiding spot, and ultimately, losing the game. It was such a bummer.

Even as adults, we can still find ourselves hiding some of our thoughts and feelings to avoid any perceived embarrassment or shame that we expect would come if exposed. As we reflect upon this week's reading, we are reminded that the last thing God wants us to do is hide from him. He longs to have constant connection with us and that we would bring all of our thoughts and feelings to him—not to expose us, but to love and care for us.

The best part is, when we are “found” by God, we actually win because it brings us closer to him.

PREP:

Set Up: Take a few moments to arrange your environment for listening and reflection. If you're the kind of person who needs to move a bit before you can be still, take a 5-10 minute walk first. You can also make some coffee or tea, light a candle, get cozy in your favorite chair, or whatever else you need to prepare your heart for a time of reflection.

Pray: Take a moment to ask God to quiet your mind and allow for clarity as you reflect on this week's study.

Capture: Have a journal ready (paper, tablet, phone, or computer) to write down your responses to the following questions along with any associated thoughts that may follow.

PAUSE

Spend time in prayer repeating this as many times as is necessary until you feel it cementing in your heart and mind:

Jesus, will you give me the courage and bravery to believe that you love me in the midst of my deep and dark feelings? Thank you, God, that your unfailing love and mercy continues to seek me out, even when I am drowning in or running away in guilt, shame, envy, or anger. Help me remember that your eyes continue to look at me with kindness and understanding that far exceeds my comprehension. With you, God, I am safe. I can be fully human and messy. I don't have to try and figure out how to be healthy or good on my own, I can trust you to restore me by the mysterious and beautiful work of your Holy Spirit. You call me your beloved just as I am, not as I think I should be. Let me run to you in my imperfections and trust that you call me your child. I am yours, just as I am. May I trust that your compassion and kindness are constantly reaching out to me. Give me the faith to believe that you long for connection with me, just as I am.

WEEK 2

NOTES



WEEK 3

THE CALM & GROUNDED FEELINGS

This week, our reading will focus upon psalms that lead us toward feelings of being grounded and steady - approaching life with a sense of calm confidence as we rely on the nourishing, supportive, steadying love of God. Child psychologists often reference the process of *co-regulation* as a way to help children build resilience for big feelings as they experience an emotion, internalize the calming presence of a parent or caregiver, and return to a calm state again. This week's readings provide us with an invitation to experience God as the ultimate co-regulator as we learn to internalize his steadiness, rely on his abundant resources, and rest in the reality that we are fully known and safe in his presence.

WEEK 3 DAY 1: PSALM 1 (GROUNDED)

AUTHOR: UNATTRIBUTED • GENRE: WISDOM

In today's reading, the psalmist expresses that goodness and steadiness in life can be found in *meditating* upon Scripture. To meditate on Scripture simply involves sitting with a very small passage, slowing down, and reflecting upon it in a deeper way.

Psalm 1 provides a beautiful image that we can meditate upon today—how a person who lives a life of faith is like a “tree planted by streams of water.” As we meditate on this image, here are some themes we can consider together:

- **Consistent, Internal Nourishment.** A tree planted by a stream of water does not need to rely upon rain or even a caring gardener to water it, because its very root system is consistently connected to and receiving nourishment from the stream.
- **External Nourishment.** When a tree is consistently nourished, it will show externally, providing nourishment to others. Also, the tree produces fruit “in season” (1:3), which speaks to the necessity of rhythms of productivity and rest, so that it doesn't “wither” (1:3), or as we might say in today's language, *burn out*.

When we live life this way, it produces a sense of groundedness—as we rely on the presence and sustaining love of God to empower us to approach life with confidence and resilience.

NOTE:

This psalm provides an example of *parallel structure*—contrasting the life of the righteous and the life of the wicked. Also—in its original language—the first word of the psalm begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet and the last word ends with the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet! (Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*)

READ: PSALM 1

REFLECT:

1) What people, places, or practices help you to feel connected and grounded in God's love?

2) What are common signals that you're beginning to experience burnout?

3) How might the practice of meditating upon Scripture help you to find your way back to a sense of rootedness in your relationship with God?

PRAY:

Take a few moments to practice meditative prayer using the imagery of this psalm as your guide. Close your eyes and spend some time imagining yourself with deep roots connected to an infinite source of God's love, goodness, and power. Then, imagine yourself using this internal strength to pour out goodness and love into the lives of those you will interact with today.

WEEK 3 DAY 2: PSALM 23 (KEPT)

AUTHOR: DAVID • GENRE: HYMN OF PRAISE, TRUST PSALM

“You can leave the ninety-nine
To look for me
Any day
Even if it is a little crazy.”
— Macrina Wiederkehr

Psalm 23 is one of the most well-known passages in the entire Bible. Before becoming the King of Israel, David himself was a shepherd, familiar with a life of keeping sheep. David uses the metaphor of a shepherd to illustrate what life with God is like—to be sustained, watched over, guided, and protected by a good, abundantly resourced, ultimately loving Being. It is an invitation to a life lived in the constant “with-ness” of God.

In the New Testament, Jesus refers to himself as the “good shepherd.” Dallas Willard writes, “the gospel that Jesus proclaimed ... was about the kingdom of God—God’s immediate availability, his ‘with-us-ness’” (*Life Without Lack: Living in the Fullness of Psalm 23*). Life with God as our shepherd does not mean that we don’t experience hardship or difficult emotions—it means that we have the opportunity to experience the presence of God with us, whatever we face.

NOTE:

The word pastor is originally linked to the word shepherd.
(Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*)

READ: PSALM 23

REFLECT:

1) When in your life have you experienced the comfort or provision of God in a noticeable way?

2) When in your life have you experienced the presence of God with you amidst difficult life circumstances?

3) How would it impact your daily life and relationships to live with a persistent awareness of God's presence with you?

PRAY:

Read Psalm 23 aloud as a prayer.

WEEK 3 DAY 3: PSALM 27 (SAFE)

AUTHOR: DAVID • GENRE: INDIVIDUAL LAMENT

This psalm explores what a relationship with God looks like when we experience God as *safe*—sheltering and protecting us from danger. This psalm contains images of protection, and a desire for closeness with God that allows us to face difficulty and fear with a sense of confidence and security.

Toward the end of the psalm, David writes, “Even if my father and mother abandon me, the LORD will hold me close” (27:10). God designed us to experience trust and safety in our relationships with our parents and early caregivers that lays a foundation for us to experience a similar level of trust and safety in our spiritual lives. Unfortunately, many of us have experienced abandonment and pain from our families of origin, and the process of learning to feel safe with God can feel complicated. The beauty of this psalm is it reveals that God longs to offer this safety to us and extends an invitation to become the ultimate secure attachment figure our hearts long for.

NOTE:

This psalm encourages readers to continue to nurture a relationship of trust with God in the face of obstacles. (Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*)

READ: PSALM 27

REFLECT:

1) When you think of your early life experiences, did you experience your parents/caregivers as mostly safe or unsafe?

2) How has this experience impacted your view of God?

3) How might feeling trust and safety with God impact your ability to face challenges or anxiety provoking situations in your life?

PRAY:

If your relationship with your family of origin was connected and safe, spend some time in prayer today thanking God for the ways your parents/caregivers reflected God's safety and love. If your relationship with your family of origin is anywhere along the spectrum of typical to more severe dysfunction, spend some time in prayer asking that God would continue to guide you in trusting him, and experiencing him as the parent your heart most longs for.

WEEK 3 DAY 4: PSALM 139 (KNOWN)

AUTHOR: DAVID • GENRE: HYMN OF PRAISE, GENERAL HYMN

This psalm explores some of the most personal and intimate aspects of relating to God—reflecting upon what it means to be known by God in every way and to experience the presence of God everywhere. It’s common to feel that if others truly knew us—our innermost thoughts and feelings, the things we’ve done on our worst days—that they wouldn’t want to be in a relationship with us.

This psalm explores how God:

- Knows our every thought, word, and action (139:1-6)
- Intricately and intentionally designed every aspect of our bodies (139:13-16)
- Has the capacity to see our entire future (139:16)

As we read this psalm, we will notice a sharp, uncomfortable contrast between David’s beautiful poetry (139:1-18) and a brief, very intense plea for God to destroy his enemies (139:19-24). Commentator Walter Brueggemann writes, “Most likely ... [David] has come to the sanctuary to protest innocence and pray for help from the God who knows, sees, and examines.” David follows his request with an invitation for God to continue to reveal anything in him that might be getting in the way of his relationship with God. As jarring as these words are to read, David expresses his innermost thoughts with the understanding that he couldn’t hide them from God, even if he tried. Here, we see it is possible to feel both fully known—unfiltered, unedited emotions and all—and fully accepted at the same time.

NOTE:

This psalm, along with many others, explores the reality of evil and darkness in the world, as well as God’s power over everything. (Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*)

READ: PSALM 139

REFLECT:

1) How does it feel to consider that you were so intricately and intentionally designed by God?

2) Is there any part of yourself that you struggle to feel God accepts? How has today’s reading impacted that feeling?

3) Are there any “blind spots” that you feel you need to become more aware of?

PRAY:

“O God
Help me
To believe
The truth about myself
No matter
How beautiful it is!”
— Macrina Wiederkehr

PAUSE

WEEK 3 DAY 5: SELAH

We have focused our attention this week on what it looks like to root ourselves in the stabilizing love of God. When observing child development, psychologists have observed that children are able to grow in independence and self-confidence through their ability to internalize the love and care of their parents or caregivers, even when separated. It's as though they're carrying a tiny version of a parent inside—that internal voice that helps them persevere through challenges, face their fears, and empower them with the assurance that they have unique gifts and strengths.

Unfortunately, we know that not everyone has this experience. As a result, it can sometimes be scary to accept God's love and care. As you take some time to reflect upon this week's study, allow yourself to sit with what it might look like to more deeply internalize the safety and love of God.

PREP:

Set Up: Take a few moments to arrange your environment for listening and reflection. If you're the kind of person who needs to move a bit before you can be still, take a 5-10 minute walk first. You can also make some coffee or tea, light a candle, get cozy in your favorite chair, or whatever else you need to prepare your heart for a time of reflection.

Pray: Take a moment to ask God to quiet your mind and allow for clarity as you reflect on this week's study.

Capture: Have a journal ready (paper, tablet, phone, or computer) to write down your responses to the following questions along with any associated thoughts that may follow.

PAUSE:

Think about your relationship and life with God and the peace, care and stability feelings you have that come from Him.

Of those, which are fleeting? Which are recurring?

When you have these, what secondary feelings do they arouse? Fear? Joy? Somewhere in-between?

When you have these, is your immediate response to hide them and pretend they aren't there or to communicate them to God?

How can you work to truly internalize these gifts from God so that they help dictate how you act and react in any given life circumstance?

PRAY:

Close your time in prayer, asking God to solidify what you learned in your mind, heart, and actions.



NOTES



WEEK 4

THE SORROWFUL & HEARTBREAKING FEELINGS

In this week's reading, we will explore some of the most deeply painful parts of being human. Over one third of the psalms are classified as *laments*, which involve grappling with experiences of God's silence, deep sorrow, betrayal, and unanswered prayers.

When we think of worship, we most often associate it with positive emotions like joy and gratitude. The overwhelming presence of laments in the Book of Psalms shows us that, not only are these painful emotions safe in God's presence, expressing them is actually a form of *worship*.

Jesus himself was known as a "man of sorrows, well acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). In his book, *A Sacred Sorrow*, Michael Card writes, "Jesus understood the honesty represented in the life that knows how to lament. His life reveals that those who are truly intimate with the Father know they can pour out any hurt, disappointment, temptation, or even anger with which they struggle."

The more fluent we become in the language of lament, the greater our capacity grows to offer empathy and compassion to others. Macrina Wiederkehr writes,

"To mourn is to be an expert
in the miracle
of being careful with another's pain."

WEEK 4 DAY 1: PSALM 13 (QUESTIONING)

AUTHOR: DAVID • GENRE: INDIVIDUAL LAMENT

“My belief is that when you’re telling the truth, you’re close to God.”
– Anne Lamott (*Help, Thanks, Wow*)

David authors the vast majority of the laments we find in the Book of Psalms, and as we read his words, we learn about how often he found himself in a place of feeling abandoned by God and stuck in emotions of sorrow and pain.

Psalm 13 also provides us with a simple, clear example of what a biblical lament looks like.

ELEMENTS OF LAMENT

1. An honest, unedited, and raw expression of deep sorrow or complaint to God
2. A supernatural shift into praise, thanksgiving, and remembrance of God’s protection, character, and rescue (with the exception of Psalm 88, which we will read later this week), often designated by the words *but, then, or yet*.

In A Sacred Sorrow, Michael Card refers to this process as *crossing the line*. Crossing the line is something that cannot be manufactured or forced—it may come quickly, but can also take time. Card writes: “Sometimes it seems simply a matter of exhaustion ... I have no more tears left to weep. I have no more outrage left to voice. At other times the person lamenting simply seems to wake up ... [calling] to mind those past times when God was faithful, when He showed up in the nick of time and saved the day.”

Lament ultimately teaches us that while we may not find answers for every question, we can move through them in God’s presence.

NOTE:

This psalm uses a structure of plea to praise, which is found often in biblical laments. (Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*)

READ: PSALM 13

REFLECT:

1) When in your life have you felt similar to David in this psalm?

2) At what point in the psalm do you notice David's heart "crossing the line?"

3) Have you ever had a personal experience of "crossing the line" during a difficult season of your life?

PRAY:

"It seems to me Lord
That we search
Much too desperately
For answers
When a good question
Holds as much grace
As an answer.

Jesus
You are the Great Questioner
Keep our questions alive
That we may always be seekers
Rather than settlers."
— Macrina Wiederkehr

WEEK 4 DAY 2: PSALM 42 (SADNESS)

AUTHOR: THE SONS OF KORAH • GENRE: INDIVIDUAL LAMENT

In today's reading, the psalmist asks the question that we all find ourselves asking when we experience prolonged seasons of difficulty, sadness, or suffering—*Why?* Sometimes, we can encounter seasons of sadness or depression, and not totally understand where they're coming from and feel like there isn't a quick or easy solution to get ourselves out.

The psalmist acknowledges that there isn't a quick fix to feelings of sadness. Instead of searching for a solution, he brings these feelings into God's presence. The psalmist expresses a desperate desire to be in God's presence, comparing himself to a deer panting for water. While the feelings of sadness don't suddenly disappear, there is something about being with God that seems to make these emotions bearable. It's as if the psalmist is saying, "I can face this as long as you're with me, God."

In her book, *Prayer in the Night*, Tish Harrison Warren writes, "the hope God offers us is this: he will keep close to us, even in darkness, in doubt, in fear and vulnerability. He does not promise to keep bad things from happening. He does not promise that night will not come, or that it will not be terrifying, or that we will immediately be tugged to shore. He promises that we will not be left alone. He will keep watch with us in the night."

NOTE:

Several early manuscripts of the Old Testament include Psalms 42 and 43 as a single psalm. (Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*)

READ: PSALM 42

REFLECT:

1) When have you experienced the emotions reflected in this psalm?

2) What do you think about the idea that God may not always grant us relief from feelings of sadness?

3) Take a look again at the quote from Tish Harrison Warren. What stands out to you the most?

PRAY:

Spend your time in prayer today bringing forward any questions you have for God—allow yourself to be as unfiltered and unedited as you can.

WEEK 4 DAY 3: PSALM 88 (HOPELESSNESS)

AUTHOR: THE SONS OF KORAH, HERMAN THE EZRAHITE
GENRE: INDIVIDUAL LAMENT

“Blessed are you if you can offer to others
A heart that feels their sorrow
A heart that can wait quietly beside them
A heart that doesn’t try to hurry the healing.”
— Macrina Wiederkehr

Psalm 88 is the only psalm of lament in the Bible that doesn’t end in comfort, praise, or a response from God. Instead, it ends with words that reflect a state of utter hopelessness—*darkness is my closest friend* (Psalm 88:18).

The inclusion of this psalm in Scripture shows us that God does not shy away from the realities of despair and unanswered prayer. Many of us have experienced the pain of God’s silence—the diagnosis that didn’t change, the addiction that ended in overdose, the mental health struggles that persist despite faithfully going to counseling or taking medication.

Perhaps the presence of a psalm that doesn’t end with “but God” reminds us that sometimes, moving to hope prematurely or inauthentically can cause harm. This process is referred to as *spiritual bypassing*—which involves minimizing the pain of another with spiritual platitudes in a way that feels dismissive and hurtful. The truth is, there are moments in life when the breakthrough doesn’t come. Here, there is an invitation to learn to sit in both our own pain and the pain of others without fixing or putting a positive spin on it.

NOTE:

This psalm reminds us that there are times where we experience difficulty we can’t explain—similar to the Old Testament story of Job. (Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*)

READ: PSALM 88

REFLECT:

1) Have you or someone close to you experienced a season of hopelessness?

2) Have you ever experienced spiritual bypassing? What was this experience like?

3) Are there times where you have perhaps used spiritual bypassing with someone? How might you approach that differently?

PRAY:

Use this prayer as a guide to pray for yourself or over someone in your life who might currently be experiencing feelings of hopelessness.

“A holy sorrow washes my soul
As the ache of others’ pain
Threads its way through my being.

Sharing their sorrow
Without trying to take it away
Brings healing and comfort.

O Christ of Those Who Mourn
Create in me a new courage
To sit beside the sorrowing.”

– Macrina Wiederkehr

WEEK 4 DAY 4: PSALM 55 (BETRAYAL)

AUTHOR: DAVID • GENRE: INDIVIDUAL LAMENT

The pain of being hurt by someone close to us is absolutely gut-wrenching. The experience of betrayal not only breaks down trust and intimacy in a relationship, but also causes us to call into question our ability to trust in ourselves and even our perception of reality. We may find ourselves asking questions like, *Was this whole relationship a lie? How did I trust this person so fully and completely miss the fact that they were secretly hurting me? How could I ever trust myself to have a healthy romantic relationship or friendship again in the future?*

In this psalm, David cries out to God from the deep pain of betrayal. He allows himself to fully express his desire for revenge and by doing so, comes to a place where he instead chooses to trust God as the ultimate bringer of justice. This psalm provides a great example of how allowing God to see our most raw and unprocessed emotions can help us move through and face them in a way that allows us to remain committed to our desire to honor God with our response, even in the most trying circumstances.

Jesus provides the ultimate example of this, and we see him respond with forgiveness and grace when he is betrayed by Judas and faces an unjust trial and death.

NOTE:

Psalm 55:6-8 runs parallel to Jeremiah 9:1-3, as Jeremiah expresses his desire to escape the struggle of feeling alienated from his community. (Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*)

READ: PSALM 55

REFLECT:

1) When in your life have you experienced betrayal?

2) Have you ever experienced someone being able to respond to betrayal without seeking revenge or attempting to hurt the one who hurt them?

3) What might it be like for you to be this honest with God about how you feel toward others who have hurt you?

PRAY:

Use the space provided to write out a totally unfiltered, honest prayer to God about someone who has hurt you (recently or in the past) that you're still holding onto.

PAUSE

WEEK 4 DAY 5: SELAH

In Genesis 1, the author writes that, before the heavens and earth were created, there was nothing but darkness and emptiness. Yet, in that dark and empty place, that “the Spirit of God was hovering over” it all. The Hebrew word for spirit is *ruach*, which is literally translated as breath—the very breath that God would use to speak creation into being. From this vast, shadowy, desolate place came life, beauty, purpose, and meaning.

The same Spirit that was with God in the beginning of time is now with us in all things, offering to lovingly and quietly breathe life, peace, and the solidarity of his presence into our darkness. Sit with this concept for a moment as you enter your time of *selah* today.

PREP:

Set Up: Take a few moments to arrange your environment for listening and reflection. If you’re the kind of person who needs to move a bit before you can be still, take a 5-10 minute walk first. You can also make some coffee or tea, light a candle, get cozy in your favorite chair, or whatever else you need to prepare your heart for a time of reflection.

Pray: Take a moment to ask God to quiet your mind and allow for clarity as you reflect on this week’s study.

Capture: Have a journal ready (paper, tablet, phone or computer) to write down your responses to the following questions along with any associated thoughts that may follow.

PAUSE:

Special note: use today’s time of Selah any time you feel the sorrowful and heartbreaking feelings. Repeat this:

Inhale: place your hand on your heart gently and firmly, take four second slow quiet inhales.

Exhale: keeping your hand on your heart, breathe out at just the same pace, slowly and gently. Remember *ruach*—God’s spirit is with you, hovering over your sorrow.

PRAY:

You can use this opportunity to write out your own prayer of lament, or pray along with the following prayers:

God, help me to remember that my breath is a direct connection to your Spirit. When I am sad and low, I easily feel alone. Let my very breath remind me that you are near. My breath is a direct connection to your breath, to your Spirit. Sometimes, God, the pain of my life can be too much, even my body takes on this pain. It feels as if my bones ache with sadness. May I remember, Jesus, that you were well acquainted with sorrow. You know what it feels like to endure trauma, to wonder if God had forgotten you. You have space for my suffering. When I am full of sorrow and the darkness feels too heavy, help me remember that you are a God of love. Bring to memory the times that you have been near, when I have felt your loving presence. Give me the courage to believe that you often do your best work in the darkness. You've been a creator since the beginning of time; help me to hold on and lean into the painful areas, and trust that you are creating something new inside of me. Help me to bear through these difficult feelings. Right now, your Spirit is hovering over my emptiness and darkness, my chaos and confusion. Selah.

God, sometimes it seems that all I know is heartbreak. Will you give me the discernment to know the difference between healthy heartbreak and destructive heartbreak? If I am avoiding a season of needing to let my heart break by facing grief, loss, and pain that I have pushed down for years, please lead me to people and places that will help me to feel the sadness and anguish so that I can heal my broken heart. Help me to trust that you have created us with the ability to suffer our feelings in a way that can render new life. If I am in a season of destructive heartbreak where I am repeating old patterns in my life that are harmful, or if I am living in a way that I try and manage my broken heart on my own but in a way that perpetually keeps me stuck, let your love lead me into new places of healing and wholeness. When I'm afraid to face these feelings, give me the courage to move forward, one step at a time. Comfort me with the knowledge that you are right here with me. Your Spirit is near. Keep close to me in my darkness, God. Bring to mind the ways in which David was brutally honest about his inner life—his fear, loneliness, and sadness, and how he trusted that you had space for his entire heart. Most of all God, when my sorrow stretches on for days and months, when you are silent and I begin to wonder where you are, remind me to breathe. My breath connects me to you, to your compassion, and to your love. You are right here with me. Thank you. Selah

Inhale: Place your hand on your heart gently and firmly, take four second slow quiet inhales.

Exhale: Keeping your hand on your heart, breathe out just as slowly and gently. Remember ruach, God's Spirit is with you.

NOTES



WEEK 5

THE BRIGHT & BUBBLY FEELINGS

As we come to the final week of our study, we will be focusing on psalms that explore emotions of joy and connection—both to God and others. As we spend some time leaning into the lighter and more carefree emotions, we remember that spiritual growth doesn't always need to be serious.

WEEK 5 DAY 1: PSALM 148 (CELEBRATION)

AUTHOR: UNATTRIBUTED • GENRE: HYMN OF PRAISE, CREATION

“To God be Fame and Honor and all our Hoorays!”

– Sally Lloyd-Jones, *Jesus Storybook Bible*

This psalm feels like an invitation to a party and all of creation is invited. We can often get so caught up in the daily monotony of life that we can feel stagnant, stuck, and overly serious.

Celebration at its best is loud, silly, fun, and free. Great parties have the best food, music, dancing, time to connect and laugh hard with your favorite people—and no one wants to leave. At its core, celebration is a foretaste of eternity—a here-and-now experience of the kind of life God designed for us to live forever.

NOTE:

This psalm uses repetition as a poetic device to encourage the reader to reflect upon the reality of all of creation—joining in praise to God.

(Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*)

READ: PSALM 148

REFLECT:

1) Do you find it hard or easy to celebrate? What makes celebration feel like a challenge for you?

2) What are some of your favorite ways to celebrate?

3) Why are experiences of lightheartedness and fun important for a person of faith?

PRAY:

“Amen, my Lord, Amen!
Amen to purple sunsets, starry skies
 And morning coffee
Amen to open hands and open hearts
To signs of love
 Like bread and wine
To water ever-running
And grass that’s ever-green.
Amen to oil-touched foreheads
And brought-back people,
Redeemed and healed and freed.
Amen to you! Amen to me!
And to the beauty of our names,
Amen, my Lord, Amen!”
— Macrina Wiederkehr

WEEK 5 DAY 2: PSALM 95 (BELONGING)

AUTHOR: UNATTRIBUTED • GENRE: HYMN OF PRAISE, CALL TO WORSHIP

Psalm 95 is classified as a “community song of thanksgiving.” This psalm repeatedly uses the word **us**.

Let **us** sing for joy to the Lord (95:1)

Let **us** shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation (95:1)

Let **us** come before him with thanksgiving (95:2)

Let **us** bow down in worship (95:6)

There is something so important about thanking God alongside other people—that we belong to a community serving God together and aren’t in this faith thing alone. Having faith through all of life’s ups and downs can be hard, and having a place to belong through it all makes a huge difference.

NOTE:

Psalm 95 is quoted four times in the New Testament book of Hebrews: Hebrews 3:7-11, 15, 4:3, 7. (Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*)

READ: PSALM 95

REFLECT:

1) How has being a part of a church community impacted your life?

2) How does doing life alongside other believers impact your faith?

3) What is one way that you could be more intentional about including others in your faith journey?

PRAY:

If you are able, spend your prayer time today praying with a friend, partner, or family member. If not, text a friend or someone in your small group and ask how you can pray for them today.

WEEK 5 DAY 3: PSALM 103 (LOVE)

AUTHOR: DAVID • GENRE: HYMN OF PRAISE, GENERAL HYMN

This psalm reflects the heart of someone who not only has experienced the love of God, but someone who loves God in return. Like a parent who scrolls through their kids' baby photos after they've gone to bed or old friends who begin swapping stories the moment they are reunited, David reminisces about all that God has done to show love to him personally and to his people.

The more we experience the love of God, the more we pour out love to God in return.

NOTE:

This psalm and others like it challenge the notion that God revealed in the Old Testament is a God of wrath and focuses on God's abundant grace and compassion. (Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*)

READ: PSALM 103

REFLECT:

1) As you read, which qualities of God stand out to you the most today?

2) How are these qualities significant for what you are currently experiencing in your life?

3) What are some of the most significant ways you've seen God show up in your life or the life of someone you care about?

PRAY:

Use verses 1-3 as a guide for your own prayer today, acknowledging specifically how God has impacted your life.

WEEK 5 DAY 4: PSALM 136 (THANKFULNESS)

AUTHOR: UNATTRIBUTED • GENRE: PSALM OF THANKSGIVING

We will conclude our study with one final emotion—thankfulness. To be thankful involves moving feelings of gratitude in a relational direction as we acknowledge not only the gift, but also the giver.

As we read this last psalm, we will come across a phrase that is repeated after every exclamation of gratitude—*His love endures forever*. Commentator Walter Brueggemann writes, “the central dynamic of the [God]-Israel relationship is *faithfulness* in every circumstance that evokes and requires a life of *gratitude*.”

This feels like such a fitting thought to end our journey through Psalms. In every emotion—whether light or dark, heavy or carefree—God’s steady, persistent love remains. God is unwaveringly persistent in his commitment to live in solidarity with us, always.

NOTE:

Psalm 136 is a “historical recital,” naming the many ways God has intervened on behalf of the people of Israel. (Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*)

READ: PSALM 136

REFLECT:

1) List 5-10 things that you feel grateful for over the past year.

2) As you look at your gratitude list, what are things that you could thank God for?

3) What do you think about the idea that God’s faithfulness and our gratitude is central to having a relationship with God?

PRAY:

Use your gratitude list as a guide for a personal prayer of thanksgiving. Using Psalm 136 as an example, write, *His love endures forever* after each item on your list as a reminder of God’s presence and faithfulness.

PAUSE

WEEK 5 DAY 5: SELAH

When do you experience the “bright and bubbly” feelings most often in your life? Christmas morning? Your birthday? A promotion at work? Watching a loved one open a gift you selected especially for them? Moments like these bring about shared experiences of connection, celebration, laughter, and joy. When we are experiencing difficult times, accessing these emotions can provide us with an opportunity to broaden our perspective and allow ourselves to be encouraged by how God has shown up for us in the past. Lastly, these emotions have a *communal* element as we allow ourselves to be upheld by one another.

Jesus longs for connection and is always with us. Jesus is always celebrating us as his children. The beauty of creation is always surrounding us. Lastly, there is always something to be thankful for, even in the darkest of times. The bright and bubbly feelings are always at our fingertips and can serve to either magnify an already celebratory moment or provide a means to help us get through a difficult one.

PREP:

Set Up: Take a few moments to arrange your environment for listening and reflection. If you’re the kind of person who needs to move a bit before you can be still, take a 5-10 minute walk first. You can also make some coffee or tea, light a candle, get cozy in your favorite chair, or whatever else you need to prepare your heart for a time of reflection.

Pray: Take a moment to ask God to quiet your mind and allow for clarity as you reflect on this week’s study.

Capture: Have a journal ready (paper, tablet, phone or computer) to write down your responses to the following questions along with any associated thoughts that may follow.

PAUSE:

How are you feeling today? Are you currently experiencing the bright and bubbly feelings or on the other end of the spectrum? As has been discussed, either is okay.

If you are bright and bubbly: as a means of magnifying this already celebratory moment, take time to reflect on why you are feeling this way and thank God for those reasons. Observe how doing this affects your posture and mindset.

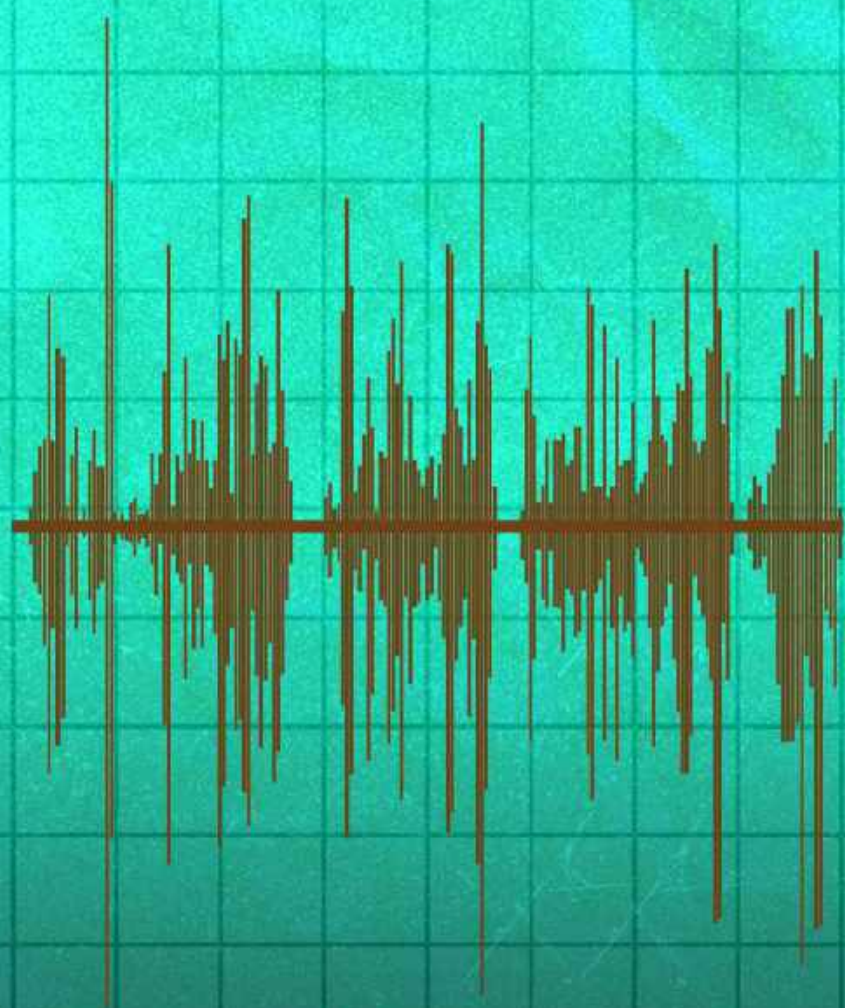
If you are not bright and bubbly: as a means to help you get through a difficult moment, take time to reflect on what helps you experience celebration, belonging, love, and thankfulness and thank God for those reasons. Observe how doing this affects your posture and mindset.

Close your time in prayer, asking God to solidify what you learned in your mind, heart, and actions.



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