

Chapter-by-Chapter Bible Studies

Selected Psalms

Psalms 1, 150, 139, 22, 51, 120-135

**Begin Every Day
with the Word...
End Every Day
with Praise**



Bible Studies
by Kathleen Dalton
www.kathleendalton.com

Selected Psalms

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Introduction

The Psalms are cries of the heart. They are a collection, meant to be read out loud or sung with emotion. You will not find a cold, unfeeling one among them. If they are doing their job, they will make you sad, guilty, and soaringly joyful.

You'd think with all the emotion displayed on the pages of the Psalms that they would have to have been written by women. But their authors were men! King David, a man described as "after the heart of God", wrote many of them. But also they were written by King Solomon, David's son, a man who took many wives and was led astray by them. And by Asaph, a song-leader, and Moses, a rebel who tried to lead a nation and failed, only to try once again forty years later. And there were others, some whose names we will never know. Many were written as journal entries – during times of pain or celebration. Some were written to teach and lead a whole nation to worship their God.

The Psalms address the real needs of people. Not the surface needs, but the real ones.

What am I trying to say?

We are going to spend time studying a few Psalms, learning, from a group of dysfunctional, emotional men who lived over 3000 years ago, to spiritually respond to God about the true needs of men and women today.



Will the Psalms really apply to my life? Take a look:

- Are you stressed? Psalm 131:2
- Are you jealous? Psalm 73
- Are you struggling with the truth of the creation story? Psalm 89:11-13, Psalm 90:2
- Are you looking back, wondering what you've accomplished? Psalm 90:10-12
- Are you successful? Psalm 115:1
- Is your life full and wonderful and you're not sure sin is such a big deal? Psalm 107:33,34

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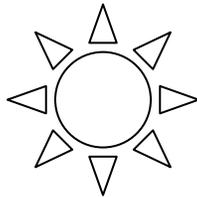
- Is your life pretty miserable but you still want to serve God? Psalm 107: 35
- Not sure where to turn for help? Psalm 91:1-4
- Have you ever looked at the ocean and wondered if there was a verse to describe what you feel? Psalm 92:4, 104:9
- Do you want to serve God, but feel like you have no training, so little to offer? Psalm 78:70-72
- Are you a mother? Psalm 78:5-8
- A grandmother? Psalm 118:18, 145:4
- Do you have trouble getting along in your family? Psalm 133
- Kids driving you nuts? Psalm 127:3-5, Psalm 128:1-4
- Do you feel like you're all alone in what you're trying to do? Psalm 125:2
- Do you wonder if God will ever stop loving you? Psalm 136
- Do you rage at injustice? Psalm 24:1-10,22,23
- Do you love nature? Psalm 104:10-24, 32
- Have you failed again, and wonder if God will ever give you another chance? Psalm 106-43-46
- Can't sleep at night? Psalm 119:62, 148
- Do you need to be convinced of the value of God's word? Psalm 119 – the whole thing – especially verse 72
- Are you choosing a career? Psalm 119 – the whole thing in one sitting.

Normally I like to recommend books for you to read as we work our way through a Bible study. But, as I've prepared this week to teach these Selected Psalms, I've read the whole collection of 150 Psalms all the way through. It took about four hours. Wow. When I did that, the Psalms just flattened me. I was knocked out by the majesty of God!

So, for these five weeks of Selected Psalms, I have a challenge for any of you who like to be challenged: Read the whole series of 150 Psalms through once a week for five weeks. I'm going to do it, too. The impact of the Psalms is indescribable when you "put your arms around it", and realize the total picture of what God was communicating through those dysfunctional men 3,000 years ago.

Week #1

Morning and Evening



Morning

Psalm 1

Psalms 1:1 “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night”

1. What does “blessed” mean?
2. How is the “blessed” person described in this verse? What characterizes his/her life?
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
3. What else does she do?

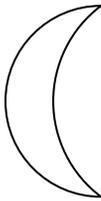
Psalms 1:3-6 “He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither. And whatsoever he does shall prosper. The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish”

4. What does life look like for the woman who lives this way?
5. What does life look like for the woman who doesn't?

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Evening

Psalm 150

Psalm 150:1 "Praise the Lord!"

1. What does praise actually look like?"

Psalm 150:1b "Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in His mighty firmament"

2. Where is His sanctuary?

Psalm 150:2 "Praise Him for His mighty acts; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness."

3. What are some of His mighty acts in your life?
4. What are some of His mighty acts in history?

Psalm 150:3-5 "Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet, praise Him with the lute and harp! Praise Him with the timbrel and dance. Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes! Praise Him with loud cymbals; praise Him with clashing cymbals!"

5. What are some ways to praise Him with music?

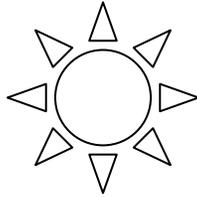
Psalm 150:6 "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!"

6. This is our memory verse for the week. What can you do to learn it?

Week #1

Morning and Evening

Notes for Discussion



Morning

How do you start your day? What is your first thought when you realize sleep is over for the night? Do you head straight for the shower? Straight for the Cheerios? Do you eat breakfast at all? Do you wake up happy? Do you lay out your clothes the night before, or do you stand and stare at your closet waiting for inspiration? Do you look at your calendar? Check the weather? Are the kids already up, or do you try to steal a few quiet moments before they begin to rise? Do you fix lunches, line them upon the kitchen counter, and give good-bye kisses as everyone grabs their lunchbox & heads out the door? (June Cleaver). What is your idea of a perfect way to start the day?

I have a suggestion. Psalm 1 and Psalm 150 begin and end the book of Psalms. As I was reading through them, choosing psalms for this series, I thought they were the perfect Psalms to begin and end my day. I'll tell you upfront that today's lesson isn't going to be very complicated. I think we'll learn from these two psalms to begin the day with God's Word, and end it with praise.

Psalm 1

Psalms 1:1 "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night"

I love questions. I always ask questions. What questions can we ask as we read this first verse of Psalms 1? How about:

- What does "blessed" mean?
- How is the "blessed" person described in this verse? What characterizes his/her life?

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First: What does “blessed” mean? Here’s a few little trivia items:

1. The word “blessed” occurs 303 times in 287 verses in the NKJV
2. It’s the Hebrew word ,**אשר** pronounced “eh’sher”.
3. It means “happiness”, and this first verse could just as easily start out saying “O Happy Man...!!”, or, “O Happy Woman...!!”

So what is this verse telling us as we start out reading in the Psalms? There is a way to be a happy woman. There is a way to wake up happy each morning.

Interested? Read on.

Second: How is this happy woman described? What characterizes her life?

1. She doesn’t take advice from the unGodly people of the world.

Can we talk? There’s an awful lot of advice out there. We listen to messages of wisdom from the most unbelievable sources. The daily newspaper tells us what is happening in Iraq and how we should feel about it. The woman checking me out at Kroger tells me who she thinks will win “American Idol”. Rachel Ray shows me how to make “30-Minute Meals”. My friends steer me away from bad movies. Local politics asks me to follow their lead on walking paths, garbage collection and street resurfacing. The shows I watch on TV tell me what size I’d like to be, and what clothes I’d like to wear.

The happy woman may hear all that advice, but she has a “don’t-take-this-seriously” button in her heart which makes her ask the question: Who is telling me this? Does that person love Jesus more than anything in the world? If the advice she is hearing comes from an unGodly person, then the happy woman keeps listening, keeps asking, keeps looking for better answers.

2. She doesn’t walk in the same path as the sinners of the world.

This is pretty straightforward. Does your normal daily walk include activities which are sinful? Lust? Lying? Taking that which isn’t yours? Speaking evil about others? Anger? Pride? Jealousy? Obsession? Addiction?

The happy woman looks forward to her day, knowing she had made a conscious decision to walk a different path from most of the rest of the people in her life. A calm and pure path.

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Does she always succeed? Probably not. But it's where her heart is headed. It's her desire. It's what gets her up in the morning: "Today I want to walk in God's ways."

3. She doesn't participate with the scornful of the world

Straightforward again. The happy woman doesn't spend a whole lot of time complaining, or talking mean about someone else, or scorning the rest of the world for the mess it is.

These first three characteristics of a happy woman are simple: The happy woman is intentional about:

What she listens to
What she does, and
What she says.

Nice. But does it pop into your mind that you'd like to do those things, in fact, you've tried to do those things, but your best intentions usually melt like ice cream on a hot day by about 10:00 am?

That's why we need verse 2:

4. She delights in the Bible, and thinks about it day and night.

This is where your efforts which always fail will be caught up into success. This will get you up happy in the morning.

Let the Words of God run through your mind all day and all night...and wake up thinking about them at dawn's first light.

If you've never been very disciplined about reading the Bible, it will take a little practice at first, because your first inclination will be to do everything else first. Or you will oversleep. Or you will put off 'till tomorrow what you decided to do today. But keep at it. Give yourself a goal of opening your Bible every morning, and reading. Get up earlier. Read your Bible instead of watching the morning news. Read verses to your children as they eat. Post verses on the kitchen cabinets, or the bathroom mirror. Talk to your husband about it. Read out loud to no one at all. Put a scripture verse in the shoes you'll wear for the day, so those words of God will be in the way where you can't forget to read them.

Once you regularly spend time in God's Word every day, then the Holy Spirit has something to work with. He can bring those words back to you

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as you drive to work, or erase a chalkboard, or stand at the water cooler and talk.

When I was a young Mom I asked God to help me read my Bible every day. It seemed no matter what I did, I always ended up the day without having even cracked it open. And by the end of the day I just wanted to sink into my bed, all thoughts of concentrating on something at that point were null and void.

God gave me a plan. I look back now and call it “Three square meals a day”. I decided to read my Bible as often as I ate. So I chose a book of the Bible to read my way through, and started on it in the morning. I would read a few verses, then ask God to please bring those verses to my mind later in the day, then I would reach for the first child who needed to be dressed.

At noontime I would read in either Psalms or Proverbs, again, just a few verses a day.

And sometime in the late afternoon, for quite a few years that meant I did this while nursing a baby, I would pick up my Bible again and take off where I left off in the morning. Just a few minutes. Just a few verses.

The Lord took those wonderful years of three-time-a-day, “a little bit at a time”, and slowly began to change me. He taught me truths, convinced me of sin I needed to let go of, made me more loving and kind, and I can honestly tell you, as I look back, that I was a happy woman. I had five little children, very little money, weighed more than I wanted to most of the time, didn't have the cute clothes I thought I needed, never had time to myself...but, contrary to what the unGodly of the world would predict, I was a very happy woman.

Psalms 1:3-6 “He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither. And whatsoever he does shall prosper. The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish”

What does life look like for the woman who lives this way? Life is pleasant, cool, no thirst at all. Fruit comes forth at the right season. The things she is working on are green, healthy. And she is prosperous.

Does that describe you? Then keep delighting in God's Word. Does it not describe you? Then begin to delight daily in God's Word. When you start your day with God, listening

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to Him, taking direction from Him, then you have the ability to choose better what you listen to, what you do, and what you say.

The people who don't know God, who don't know how to walk with God, who don't have a clue about getting up every morning and reading their Bibles...those people are dry and dusty (no matter how they look) and could be easily blown away by the first dry wind. They are heading only toward judgment, and do not know daily happiness at all. No matter what your eyes tell you when you look at someone who "has it all together", if they don't have a daily time to read the Bible and listen to God, they are not happy people. They have no idea what happiness truly is.

I know it sounds too simple, but there it is. Will life really be radically different if I just get up every morning and fill my eyes and heart with the Bible? Yes.

Will everything be perfect? No. Perfect comes later, in heaven. But happy – abiding happiness - can be now - first thing every morning.



Evening

Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.

How do you usually end your day? Do you pray about the things which are weighing heavily on your heart? Watch a little TV and then slide in between the sheets and close your eyes? Lay in bed and toss and turn a little? Talk or laugh with your spouse? Check every sleeping child, make sure the stove is turned off and the doors are locked? Listen to the sounds of a silent house?

Just before you close your eyes tonight, do this: Praise God.

Psalm 150

Psalms 150:1 "Praise the Lord!"

I was thinking about this part of today's lesson and wondering, "What does praise actually look like?" For instance, if I count all my blessings, is that praise for God? Should I recall all the mighty things He has done in the past? Should I thank Him for everything in my life?

Psalms 150:1b "Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in His mighty firmament"

So I was sitting outside Friday night as the sky began to darken, and I looked up into the heavens. I saw the first star glimmer right up above me. In my mind's eye I took a few minutes to picture the fingers of Jesus placing that star in its position. I thought about Him creating the world. I looked around me at the trees and grass and wondered how He was able to picture a tree before there ever was one. I just thought about Him and thought about Him and thought about Him. That was praise.

Psalm 22:3 says that the Lord's throne is the praises of Israel. In other words, if you want to praise Him in His sanctuary, just start praising Him. The place where you are praising is the place where He dwells.

Psalms 150:2 "Praise Him for His mighty acts; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness."

One of the nice things about being my age is that you have lots of life history to look back on. Lots of stories to tell. I can look back on our life together and remember so many times when God's hand in our life was so visible. I have so many memories of things I can praise God for. I could just begin at the beginning, remember how Ken and I met, how we dated and knew we were in love, how we planned together to serve God for the rest of our lives. I can recall our first church, all the mistakes we made, but also all the things we learned, all the people we learned to love even though we were still so young and selfish ourselves. I can remember the houses we lived in, and how we moved from place to place, always provided for. I remember the birth of each of our children, and how excellent the hand of God was in the miracle of a little person coming into our lives. I could go on and on – but you get the point. There is truly no end to the things I could praise God for – His mighty acts in my life.

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But why stop there? Look at all the mighty acts of God we see recorded in scripture. If you run out of things to praise God for in your life, the Psalms are filled with lists of the things God has done. Look at Psalms 74:12-17, or Psalms 105:16-45, just for a start.

Psalm 150:3-5 “Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet, praise Him with the lute and harp! Praise Him with the timbrel and dance. Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes! Praise Him with loud cymbals; praise Him with clashing cymbals!”

Music. Put on a CD of your favorite praise songs. Pick up your guitar and hum a few lines. Listen to some of the songs we sing from the Psalms:

Psalm 8:1 “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth...”

Psalm 23:1 “The Lord is my shepherd, no want shall I know...”

Psalm 25:1 “Unto you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul...”

Psalm 27:1 “The Lord is my light, and my salvation...”

Psalm 30:4&5 “Sing praise to the Lord, ye saints of His...”

Psalm 32:7 “You are my hiding place....”

Psalm 36:5&6 “Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens...”

Psalm 51:10 “Create in me a clean heart, O God...”

Psalm 63:3&4 “Thy lovingkindness is better than life...”

Psalm 84: 1,2,10 “How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord almighty...”

Psalm 89:1 “I will sing of the mercy of the Lord forever...”

Psalm 95: 6&7 “Come let us worship and bow down...”

Psalm 103:1 “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me...”

Psalm 118:24 “This is the day, this is the day that the Lord has made....”

Psalm 118:26 “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord...”

Psalm 121:1&2 “I lift my eyes unto the hills, where does my help come from?...”

Psalm 125:2 “As the mountains are around Jerusalem,...”

Psalm 134:1&2 “Behold, bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord...”

Psalm 139:23&24 “Search me, O God, and know my heart ...”

Psalm 150:6 “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord...”

Psalm 150: “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!”

When Sarah went away to college, she chose Taylor University. Her sister, Beth, was there, and it was a great school. But she found, after one year, that Taylor didn't quite meet her needs. It wasn't that it didn't offer the major she wanted, and it wasn't that it

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wasn't academically challenging, and it wasn't that it was too challenging. It was that she was still the youngest Dalton there. She wanted to be "Sarah" someplace, instead of Beth's sister, or Andy's sister, or Chad's sister, or Steve's sister.

She had a friend who had gone to a small, unknown (to us) Christian college in Phoenix, Arizona. It was really small. She nervously applied, hoping above hope that she could transfer there and finish up her education. Her friend, who had been there a year, jokingly told her not to worry about getting accepted. He said the school was in such need of new students that she would qualify if she could just "fog a mirror". (she did, by the way, get accepted)

So use that as your mental picture for this last phrase for today's lesson. If you can "fog a mirror", you can praise God.

Start your day meditating on His word. End your day praising Him. Try it this week. You won't believe the simple happiness you will experience when those two things are the most important things you do each day.

Psalm 150: "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!"

This is our memory verse for the week. Let it run through your head and your heart every night.

Week #2

“...God, I Miss You...”

Psalm 139 – Questions for Discussion

Psalms 139:1 “O Lord, You have searched me and known me.”

1. What does it mean to really “know” someone?
2. How many people in your life really “know” you?
3. Why so few?
4. Do you feel like the Lord really “knows” you? (Psalm 44:21) (Psalm 33:13-15)
5. When did God begin to “know” you? Was it when you began to search for Him? (Psalm 63:1) (Psalm 14:1-3) (John 6:44)

Psalms 139:2a “You know when I sit down and when I rise up...”

6. Put this verse into your own words. When are you sitting down? When are you rising up?

Psalms 139:2b “You understand my thought from afar.”

7. How can God know what I am thinking? (Matthew 9:4) (Isaiah 66:18)

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8. Can Satan understand what I am thinking?

Psalm 139:3 “You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways.”

9. If God knows my thoughts, and sees every step I take, do I have any chance of keeping a secret from Him?

10. Why do any of us think, then, that we can?

Psalm 139:4 “Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, You know it all.”

11. Would you say, from these verses, that God knows us better than we know ourselves? (Hebrews 4:13)

Psalm 139:5 “You have enclosed me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me.”

12. What does this mean? Is it comforting...or is it frightening?

13. How should I react to this truth?



Psalm 139:6 “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain to it.”

Psalm 139:7&8 “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.”

14. Some people hate and run away from this truth...why? (John 3:20)

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Psalm 139: 9&10 “If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will lay hold of me.”

15. Is the writer changing his tune? Is God’s presence starting to sound good to him? (Psalm 18:35) Is there something significant about God’s *right* hand? (Psalm 17:7, 18:35, 20:6, 44:3, 60:5) (Revelation 1:17)

Psalm 139:11&12 “If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, and the light around me will be night.’ Even the darkness is not dark to You, and the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You.”

16. Is there anyplace to which we can run to escape from God? Can we ever be in so much darkness that He cannot find us? What are some examples of dark places where we might feel lost and separated from God?

Psalm 139:13&14 “For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

17. What is one good reason God knows me so well? (Psalm 71:5&6)

Psalm 139:15 “My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;...”

18. What does this verse mean? When were you and I skillfully put together in the depths of the earth? (Genesis 2:7)

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Psalm 139:16 “Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.”

19. Who decided my birthday was going to be on January 20th, 1948, in Long Beach, California? When did God first know me? Was it at the time of my conception...or on the day of my birth...or some other time? Do all these details really matter to God? (Ps. 87:6)
20. What “book” is the Psalmist talking about? (Rev. 13:8, 20:15)
21. When was the day of my death decided? What should I do because of this truth? (Psalm 90:10-12)

Psalm 139:17&18a “How precious also are your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand.”

22. How is the writer of Psalm 139 responding himself to these truths about God?

Psalm 139:18b “When I awake, I am still with You.”

23. The Psalmist has come full circle.
 - a. He started out realizing that God knows him better than he knows himself.
 - b. That thought was at first frightening, and the Psalmist wanted to somehow hide himself from God.
 - c. But then he began to realize how much he needed and wanted to know God himself, and he felt comforted by how well God knew him.
 - d. Then he realizes that God has known him since before he was even born, and that God had actually planned every day of his life, even knowing the day of his death.
 - e. He responds to all of that with wonder, craving God even more...and now....

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- f. What is his next response?

Psalm 139: 19-22 “O that You would slay the wicked, O God; depart from me, therefore, men of bloodshed. For they speak against You wickedly, and Your enemies take Your name in vain. Do I not hate those who hate You, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with the utmost hatred; they have become my enemies.”

24. Wow! Where does all this hatred come from?

Psalm 139:23-24 “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.”

25. What is the Psalmist’s final response to truths which nearly overwhelm him?
- Psalm 19:9&10
 - Psalm 49:20

26. When any of us finally realizes the hugeness of God and His care for every detail of our lives and the immensity of what we lost when we became sinners, what can we possibly do?

Week #2

“...God, I Miss You...”

Psalm 139 – Discussion Notes

Three simple questions will give you the key to studying the Bible:

- What does it say?
- What does it mean?
- What does it mean to me?

No matter which passage you are looking at, if you thoughtfully ask and answer those three questions you will find you are “getting something out of” your time in the Bible.

“What does it say?” is usually just a matter of repeating the passage in your own words, just to be sure you are understanding what you read. All you are doing is **observing** what is plainly there in front of you.

“What does it mean?” is your time to **ask questions** – which will lead you to notes in the margin of your Bible, or to your own understanding of how words are used, or perhaps to asking someone else with Bible knowledge. In this step all you are doing is asking questions about the passage – making sure you do understand all the words and phrases which were being used, and trying to get your arms around the way the original hearers of the passage would have understood it.

“What does it mean to me?” – well, that’s self-explanatory, isn’t it? Every word written in the Bible was intended not only for head knowledge, but also for heart knowledge. In other words, the Bible is meant to change you – so with each passage it is good to ask: “What am I supposed to do because I have read and understood this?” You are **applying**.

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As we talk through Psalms 139, you'll notice that all of the discussion questions we go through fall into one of the above categories: What does it say? What does it mean? What does it mean to me? It's not all that complicated, is it?

Psalms 139:1 "O Lord, You have searched me and known me."

1. Put this phrase into your own words. (**What does it say?**)

My own words? O God, you have figured me out.

2. What does it mean to "know" someone? (**What does it mean?**)

In my opinion, it means to understand what makes them tick...to know how they are going to react...to almost be able to predict what their attitude will be about something. You get to know someone by being with them, observing them, liking them, wanting to know them better and better.

3. How many people in your life really "know" you? (**What does it mean?**)

Honestly, not very many. My husband knows me best. Then perhaps my children might be next in line. They are the ones I am most transparent with. And even when I'm not trying to be transparent, they spend the most time with me, so they often see even what I am trying to keep hidden.

4. Why so few? (**What does it mean?**)

Why so few? Because it takes energy to have a relationship with someone, and you can only handle so many really close relationships. It just isn't humanly possible to really "know" very many people. I've heard it said that a person is fortunate to have just one or two true friends.

5. Do you feel like the Lord really "knows" you? (Psalm 44:21) (Psalm 33:13-15) (**What does it mean to me?**)

Now we move from the realm of what works for human beings, into the realm of what works for God. God, according to the verse above, does have the capacity to "know" everyone. To observe them, care for them, and know everything about them. Psalm 44:21 says He knows the secrets of the heart. What secrets do any of us have that we hope no one ever finds out about? Or what secrets do we have which we wish someone knew about? Psalm 44:21 tells us God knows them all. Psalm 33:13-15 goes on to tell us that God not only knows the secrets of our hearts, but He also knows about everything we have ever done...and understands why we did it. Yes, the Lord really "knows" me. That should affect my life, shouldn't it? If my life is an open book to God, I can't come to Him in pride, ever. I can't be fake with Him. I would be a fool to think I can pretend to be something I'm not.

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And also – I can relax. There’s not going to be any surprises. God already knows it all...and loves me. He’s not ever going to stop loving me, because nothing is ever going to pop up out of the blue to change how He feels about me. He already knows it all.

6. When did God begin to “know” you? Was it when you began to search for Him? (Psalm 63:1) (Psalm 14:1-3) (John 6:44) (**What does it mean to me?**)

Why is it important to answer this question? Because if God began to “know” me when I began to reach out to Him, then I am the one who instigated the relationship. But if God knew me first, long before I even cared about knowing Him, then He is the One who started the ball rolling.

So, which is it? Psalm 63:1 describes the way I felt when I began to hunger for God. I felt thirsty, and I sought Him earnestly. I felt empty inside and longed to fill that emptiness with Him.

Psalm 14:1-3 describes the real me before I began to long for God. I was corrupt. I had no interest in seeking after God. I was going about my life with one purpose only: What will make me happy? What is good for me? What is the best decision for me....me....me....? This person I am honestly describing had no interest in God at all. So how did I start hungering after God?

Jesus answered this question in John 6:44. *“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent Me draws him...”* God began the process. He began to draw me to Himself, and then I started hungering for Him. God Himself put the hunger there. He put the thirst there. He let me feel the emptiness.

Conclusion? God knew me first. The verse we are asking all these questions about is saying, then, “O God, you figured me out long before I was interested in connecting with You. You have been loving me for a long, long, time.” Wow.

Psalms 139:2a “You know when I sit down and when I rise up...”

7. Put this verse into your own words. (**What does it say?**) When are you sitting down? When are you rising up? (**What does it mean?**)

Let’s see. Here are some of the things I do sitting down:

- Eat
- Read
- Watch TV

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- Talk
- Drive the car
- Work at my computer
- Surf the internet
- ...yes...sleep

And here are some of the things I do rising up – or – standing:

- Talk
- Fix dinner
- Get ready in the morning
- Exercise
- Clean the house
- Teach

So, to put this into my own words, I would say: “O God, you see everything I do – when I am resting and when I am active.”

Psalms 139:2b “You understand my thought from afar.”

8. How can God know what I am thinking? (Matthew 9:4) (Isaiah 66:18) (**What does it mean?**)

Matthew 9:4 tells us Jesus knew the thoughts of the people He was talking to. Isaiah 66:18 tells us the same thing. God knows the thoughts of men. How does He do it? He’s God. There are simply certain things which are true of God. And this is one of them. God knows our thoughts.

9. Can Satan understand what I am thinking? (**What does it mean to me?**)

Here’s one of the favorite things I like to teach when I am going through Bible studies in groups: Satan is not an evil God. Satan is an evil angel. Satan is a created being. Created by God. Many of us have the misconception that Satan is just as powerful as God, but is evil. That’s not true. Satan does not have the Godly ability to know our thoughts...because Satan is not a God. He’s an angel. An evil angel. Angels do not know what we are thinking. They know what we are doing, because they can see. But scripture does not say they know what we are thinking.

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Psalm 139:3 “You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways.”

10. If God knows my thoughts, and sees every step I take, do I have any chance of keeping a secret from Him? (**What does it mean to me?**)
Nope.

11. Why do any of us think, then, that we can? (**What does it mean to me?**)
Good question. I guess we tend to put God into a box – one of our own making – which says He can’t do anything unless we want Him to. Not true.

Psalm 139:4 “Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, You know it all.”

12. Would you say, from these verses, that God knows us better than we know ourselves? (Hebrews 4:13) (**What does it mean?**)
He knows what we are going to say before we say it? Hebrews 4:13 summarizes it all: *“And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”*

Psalm 139:5 “You have enclosed me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me.”

13. What does this mean? Is it comforting...or is it frightening? (**What does it mean to me?**)
I’m claustrophobic, so usually the idea of being hemmed in, or enclosed, is frightening. But I don’t think this verse is describing me being trapped by God. I think it is describing me being protected by God. I picture this as a fence around a wide open field – giving me room to roam and discover, but keeping me from hurting myself. That’s exactly how I see my life as I look back. God knew me and loved me long before I ever reached out to Him. And that whole time I was living unaware of Him, He was watching out for me, surrounding me with protection, so that I could not destroy myself before the time was right for Him to reach out to me.

14. How does the Psalmist react to this truth? (**What does it say?**)



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Psalm 139:6 “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain to it.”

I react this way, too. It’s just a little too difficult to figure this whole thing out. I believe He loves me this much, and has watched over me my whole life, but I really can’t understand it.

Psalm 139:7&8 “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.”

15. Some people hate and run away from this truth...why? (Isaiah 59:20) (John 3:20)
(What does it mean?)

The answer is simple and sad. Once we know how powerful God is, and how much He cares for us, and how very perfect and Holy He is, sometimes we just want to run away from Him. Because we see ourselves in His light, and we do not measure up. We are so filthy compared to Him. Isaiah 59:20 describes how we feel at that moment: *“But your iniquities (sins) have made a separation between you and your God...”* We feel like the gulf between us and God is too great to ever be bridged, so we run away from God. We don’t want to feel the horrible pressure of guilt. Jesus described it in John 3:20: *“For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light, for their deeds were evil.”*

Psalm 139: 9&10 “If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will lay hold of me.”

16. Is the writer changing his tune? Is God’s presence starting to sound good to him? (Psalm 18:35) Is there something significant about God’s *right* hand? (Psalm 17:7, 18:35, 20:6, 44:3, 60:5) (Revelation 1:17) **(What does it mean?)**

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It does sort of sound like the Psalmist initially thought of running away from God, but then, somehow, he was drawn back to this love of God. I can see in my mind's eye a cartoon played out – with the character running as fast as he can in the wrong direction, then slowly his legs begin to slow down even though his body is still straining in the wrong direction. And eventually his legs stop altogether, and the character is wondering...do I really want to run in

this direction? Psalm 18:35 describes God in a curious way: “...*Your gentleness makes me great.*” Why would we want to run away from this gentle God? Maybe there's some other way to solve the problem of our sinfulness compared to His holiness? Maybe He will help us?

So many places in scripture the right hand of God is mentioned. I've listed a few above. If you read even just the ones I listed, you come away with a definite impression. The right hand of God is powerful. He extends mercy with it. He destroys enemies with it. He reaches out with it and changes what needs to be changed. We need and long for the right hand of God even when our legs are running as fast as they can away from it.

Psalm 139:11&12 “If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, and the light around me will be night.’ Even the darkness is not dark to You, and the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You.”

17. Is there anyplace to which we can run to escape from God? Can we ever be in so much darkness that He cannot find us? What are some examples of dark places where we might feel lost and separated from God? (**What does it mean?**)

My Mom lived in darkness her whole life. She was religious, but didn't have a saving relationship with God. She got to the point in her later years that she didn't even want to hear the name of Jesus. It made her mad to think people would be so narrow-minded as to think He was the only way to eternal life.

And then her body began to fail her. She developed severe osteoporosis, then Parkinson's Disease. She would fall and break bones over and over and over. Then dementia set in.

How dark can darkness be? She didn't know God, didn't know He knew her. She was suffering, rapidly approaching death, and sliding into a condition where she soon wouldn't even know how bad off she was.

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When things were at their very worst for her, I read this psalm, and I was comforted by these two verses...Psalm 139: 11,12: “*Even the darkness is not dark to you.*” There really is no darkness which cannot be lit up by Jesus Christ. Really. John 1:9 says Jesus is: “*...the true Light, which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.*” I clung to this verse in Psalm 139, memorized it, and said it over and over.

The dementia was the light. Whatever had led my Mom to a place of hating to even hear the name of Jesus somehow got forgotten in the onset of dementia. Dementia eliminated a stubborn, evil place in her mind...long enough to give her the freedom to consider the claims of this Jesus she used to distrust. And she came to faith in Him.

How dark can darkness be? Not dark enough to block the light of Jesus.

18. Have you ever run away from God? Why did you do it? Did it work?
(**What does it mean?**)

Psalm 139:13&14 “For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

19. What is one good reason God knows me so well? (Psalm 71:5&6) (**What does it say?**)

He knows me so well because He formed me. He was there when I was conceived. He saw my cells begin to split and form. He was intimately involved in the forming of all my body parts. Look at Psalm 71:6: “*By You I have been sustained from my birth; You are He who took me from my mother’s womb; my praise is continually of You.*”

Psalm 139:15 “My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;...”

20. What does this verse mean? When were you and I skillfully put together in the depths of the earth? (Genesis 2:7) (**What does it mean?**)

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Skillfully put together in the depths of the earth. Hmmmm. That would be describing something which happened before I was in the womb, right? I mean, the depths of the earth is definitely not the same place as the womb. So, when would that have been? Did I exist before I was conceived? Is that what this is saying?

Look at Genesis 2:7 “*Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground...*” I think this is what the Psalms 139:15 verse is referring to. When God made Adam, and used the dirt of the ground to do it, he placed in Adam all the future people to be born in the world. In a very real sense, you and I were “in” Adam. We were the future seeds of the seeds of the seeds of the seeds of Adam. We were skillfully wrought in the earth, tiny little seeds waiting for our turn to be born, and placed within Adam. We weren’t people yet – but the seed was there which would one day become us.

Psalm 139:16 “Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.”

21. Who decided my birthday was going to be on January 20th, 1948, in Long Beach, California? When did God first know me? Was it at the time of my conception...or on the day of my birth...or some other time? Do all these details really matter to God? (Ps. 87:6) (**What does it mean?**)
God knew the date and place of my birth, who my parents would be and who my parents’ parents would be, before I was ever formed. God saw who I would be before I was ever conceived. And yes, it matters to God. Every detail matters to God. Psalm 87:6 says the Lord will count each one of us – registering us in the place of our birth: “*The Lord will count when He registers the peoples, ‘This one was born there.’*”

22. What “book” is the Psalmist talking about? (Rev. 13:8, 20:15) (**What does it mean?**)

Several times in scripture references are made to the “books” of God. In my opinion there is more than one “book”.

There is the book of life referred to here in Psalm 139, in which is recorded every name of every person alive. Each person ever to live on the earth was recorded in the book at the time of Adam’s creation. The day of their birth and the number of days they would live was recorded, too. Each person’s name is erased from that book when he/she dies...but never erased from that book if that person never dies. Our names never have to be erased from that book if we are believers in Jesus Christ – because we never die if we are

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believers in Jesus Christ. Yes, my body might die – but the real me never dies if I have life in Jesus Christ.

There also seems to be a book which records every deed we ever do. We see both of these books brought out in Revelation 20:11&12.

And then there is another book of life, called the “Lamb’s Book of Life”, referred to in Revelation 13:8. This book was also created at the foundation of the world, but it only records those people who will come to faith in Jesus Christ at some point in their life. The moment of their salvation was recorded before the foundation of the earth. Names are never erased from this book. Eternal life is received at the moment each of those people accept Jesus as their Savior, and eternal life is eternal. It is never ended. Their name in this book means they will never have to appear before the Great White Throne for judgment. (Revelation 20: 11-15)

23. When was the day of my death decided? What should I do because of this truth? (Psalm 90:10-12) (**What does it mean to me?**)

“As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years, yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; for soon it is gone and we fly away...so, teach us to number our days that we may present to you a heart of wisdom.” (Psalm 90:10-12)

God knows the day of my death. He has known from the beginning of time. What should I do, then? Learn to number my days. What does that mean? Live each day for Him. Number each day that I praise and love Him. Make each day count for Him. Leave the day of my death in His hands...today is in mine.

Psalm 139:17&18a “ How precious also are your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand. “

24. How is the writer of Psalm 139 responding himself to these truths about God? (**What does it say?**)

The writer is in love with God! He wants nothing more at this point than to spend time with God and know His thoughts. If he’s anything like me, he is realizing the unbelievable amount of time he has wasted not loving God.

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Psalm 139:18b “When I awake, I am still with You.”

25. The Psalmist has come full circle

- a. He started out realizing that God knows him better than he knows himself.
- b. That thought was at first frightening, and the Psalmist wanted to somehow hide himself from God.
- c. But then he began to realize how much he needed and wanted to know God himself, and he felt comforted by how well God knew him.
- d. Then he realizes that God has known him since before he was even born, and that God had actually planned every day of his life, even knowing the day of his death.
- e. He responds to all of that with wonder, craving God even more...and now....
- f. What is his next response? . **(What does it say?)**

His next response is so cool. He's no longer afraid. He's no longer running away, He's no longer alone. He knows that God is there when he goes to sleep and when he wakes up. God is all in all.

Psalm 139: 19-22 “O that You would slay the wicked, O God; depart from me, therefore, men of bloodshed. For they speak against You wickedly, and Your enemies take Your name in vain. Do I not hate those who hate You, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with the utmost hatred; they have become my enemies.”

26. Wow! Where does all this hatred come from? **(What does it mean?)**

It seems a little weird at first. So shocking in the midst of all this love and knowing and relationship-forming going on. But the truth is, one of our honest responses to coming to know God is a revulsion for those things which hurt Him. We love Him, so we truly do hate those things He hates. And He hates sin. Sin and those who love sin become repulsive to us.

Psalm 139:23-24 “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.”

27. What is the Psalmist's final response to truths which nearly overwhelm him? **(What does it say?)**

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Keep looking me over, God. Don't let me hurt you. Teach me to be like you, instead of like me.

- g. Psalm 19:9&10 (**What does it mean?**) I accept your decisions about what is good and what is not good. I submit to your greater wisdom.
- h. Psalm 49:20 (**What does it mean?**) I don't want to be full of myself anymore, Lord. I want to be full of you. When I am full of myself I am no better than a cow or a pig. I want to be all You want me to be.

28. When any of us finally realizes the hugeness of God and His care for every detail of our lives and the immensity of what we lost when we became sinners, what can we possibly do? (**What does it mean to me?**)

Willingly accept his assessment of our lives. Fall into the merciful arms of the God we were made to love. Come home to the One we have been missing for so long.

Week #3

“ He Is ”

Psalm 22 - Questions

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?...” (22:1)

1. Where have we heard these words before?

“Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning. O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but I have no rest. Yet You are holy. O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel. In You our fathers trusted; they trusted and You delivered them. To You they cried out and were delivered; in You they trusted and were not disappointed” (22:1-5)

2. How did Jesus feel when He was on the cross?

“But I am a worm, and not a man, a reproach of men and despised by the people. All who see me sneer at me; they separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, ‘Commit yourself to the Lord; let Him deliver him; let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.’” (22:6-8)

3. How did the crowds watching the crucifixion feel about Jesus?

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“Yet You are He who brought me forth from the womb; You made me trust when upon my mother’s breasts. Upon You I was cast from birth; You have been my God from my mother’s womb.” (22:9,10)

4. What did Jesus do on the cross when He faced the worst?

“Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help. Many bulls of Bashan have encircled me. They open wide their mouth at me, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; and You lay me in the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded me; a band of evildoers has encompassed me; they pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. The look, they stare at me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” (22:11-18)

5. What was it like physically for Jesus to be on the cross?

“But You, O Lord, be not far off; O You my help, hasten to my assistance. Deliver my soul from the sword, my only life from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion’s mouth; from the horns of the wild oxen You answer me.” (22:19-21)

6. Even through the worst of His suffering, where did He turn?

“I will tell of Your name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You. You who fear the Lord, praise Him; all you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of

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Israel. For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from him; but when he cried to Him for help, He heard.” (22:22-24)

7. What happened as a result of Jesus’ crying out to His Father?

“From You comes my praise in the great assembly; I shall pay my vows before those who fear Him. The afflicted will eat and be satisfied; those who seek Him will praise the Lord. Let your heart live forever! All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will worship before You. For the kingdom is the Lord’s and He rules over the nations. All the prosperous of the earth will eat and worship. All those who go down to the dust will bow before Him, even he who cannot keep his soul alive. Posterity will serve Him; it will be told of the Lord to the coming generation. They will come and will declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has performed it.” (22:15-31)

8. What will still happen some day as a result of the cross?

APPLICATION:

9. How do you think this Psalm was a comfort to the disciples right after Jesus’ death and resurrection?
10. How is this Psalm a comfort to you?
11. How could you use Psalm 22 to witness for Jesus today?

Week #3

“ He Is ”

Psalm 22

The year is 30. The place is Palestine.

Wandering teachers attracted disciples – men looking for a reason to live in the middle of a mean and often violent society. Some of those men thought they found their answer in a passion for politics. They looked for and fought for power.

Some of them found religion, immersing themselves in the traditions of the Jews, learning to give the proper answers to the proper questions – they sought knowledge.

Some didn't follow teachers – they grabbed for wealth, instead. And others lowered themselves into degradation, desperately sinking further and further into sin as they looked for the one pleasure which could finally erase the emptiness inside.

Very few of them realized what they were looking for. They were looking for God.

The Prophets and Poets of old had seen a man off in the distance. A man who was somehow pointing the way to God, and at the same time also was God. Curious.

The Priests taught the scriptures, but most didn't really look for the Promised One. The wandering teachers wondered about the man to come, but most of them sought more practical, immediate means to ease life's burdens.

Hardly anyone was looking for a person.

So, it was a surprise when He showed up.

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He attracted His own little collection of needy men. They followed Him, watched Him, asked Him questions, all the time moving closer and closer to the real reason they were walking alongside Him: “Where is God?” “I hunger for God.” “Will life ever be as good as He said it could?”

The longer He talked, the more they were drawn to Him. It wasn’t just His answers, it was Him! He performed miracles and more people followed Him. They began to clamor for His attention, beg for His healing touch. His first few scruffy followers watched and wondered...”What is this squeezing in my chest when I am with Him?”

Then His huge followings began to pull away. His words became hard to stomach. He was saying it wasn’t religion they needed, but Him. They needed to hunger for Him the same way they hungered for bread.

The leaders of Judaism began to actually look for ways to do away with Him. Those were the days when a follower of His was constantly looking over his shoulder, afraid death was coming for all of them.

But how could they leave Him? He was a magnet. The longer they walked with Him, the more they needed Him, loved Him.

A light began to penetrate their darkness. This was He! The One the prophets and the poets saw in the distance. He was not only pointing the way to God, He was God!

Hatred grew. It was thick around them as they flanked the Son of God at that last Passover. He rode into the city on a donkey with wildly cheering crowds lining the way, but it didn’t feel like a celebration. It felt like the beginning of the end.

They shared an intimate family meal together, feeling like fugitives.

They watched Him struggle and sweat blood in a solitary garden place, and the dread grew.

The soldiers came suddenly, overwhelmingly. He was the Son of God...wasn’t He? What was happening?

Fear triumphed. Legs which felt like rubber somehow found the strength to run! Hide! Don’t die! Sobbing. Afraid. Abandoning Him, and also feeling abandoned by Him.

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He died crying out to God. How does God cry out to God and not get an answer?

They didn't run back to their homes and families and fishing boats. They found each other and clung to each other. He had the words of life. Forward was the only direction – backward was not a choice.

When He appeared and said “Peace...”, the rejoicing began.

Then they began to assemble all the puzzle pieces. Their three and one-half years together had included many late night discussions of Who He was, and what scripture pointed to Him. At the time it made sense, but then again, it didn't...it was so curious, so unclear. But now it all suddenly came together in their minds.

Moses had told them He would be a man, (Genesis 3:15) a Jew (Genesis 12:3, 18:18), of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10), and an even greater prophet than Moses himself had been (Deuteronomy 18:15,19)

Isaiah had told them He would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), Micah had said it would be in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

Isaiah had told them a lot....

- He would minister first in Galilee (Isaiah 9:1-8). Remember when He turned the water into wine? That was in Cana, of Galilee, and was the first of His miracles!
- He would be meek and mild (Isaiah 42:2,3). It's true... He never fought back...
- He would minister to Gentiles (Isaiah 49:1,8). That Gentile woman! The one whose little girl had a demon. She begged the Lord to heal her daughter, and He did.
- He would perform miracles – so many it's going to be impossible to re-tell them all! (Isaiah 35:5&6)
- He would suffer and die and rise from the dead. (Isaiah 53, Isaiah 25:8)
- The Gentiles would seek Him. (Isaiah 11:10) Philip and Andrew could never forget how a group of Greeks wanted to talk to Jesus just before His death. (John 12:20-22)

And the Psalms – they were full of things about Him...

- He would be the Son of God. (Psalm 2:7) It took us so long to see it!
- And raised from the dead (Psalm 16:10) Why did we spend two days wondering what would happen next?

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- He would be betrayed by a friend (Psalm 41:9) Judas. The memory was still so painful for all of them.
- He would go up to heaven (Psalm 68:18)
- He would be rejected (Psalm 118:22,23)
- He would not be abandoned by God in death (Psalm 16:10)
- Not one of his bones would be broken (Psalm 34:20)
- He would be the sacrifice God loved (Psalm 40:6-8)
- He would love righteousness and hate wickedness (Psalm 45:7)
- Those who hated God would hate Him (Psalm 69:9)
- The hand of God would be on Him (Psalm 80:17)
- His throne would be established forever (89:28&29)
- Angels would watch over Him (91:11-13)
- He would execute justice for the oppressed (Psalm 146:7) remember? – the woman they caught in the act of adultery? (John 8)
- He would give food to the hungry (Psalm 146:7) Who could forget that great multitude of hungry people with no way to feed them? (John 6)
- He would open the eyes of the blind (Psalm 146:8) The man who had been blind from birth!
- He would raise up those who were bowed down (Psalm 146:8) That Samaritan woman He was talking to – He lifted her whole town up!
- And then, of course, there was Psalm 22. The events of the last few days and weeks were no longer terrifying – but they would never leave their memories:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?...” (22:1)

He cried out those words on the cross.

“Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning. O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but I have no rest. Yet You are holy. O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel. In You our fathers trusted; they trusted and You delivered them. To You they cried out and were delivered; in You they trusted and were not disappointed” (22:1-5)

He must have felt this way on the cross. Groaning. Crying out to God. Desperately needing the hand of God for deliverance.

“But I am a worm, and not a man, a reproach of men and despised by the people. All who see me sneer at me; they separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, ‘Commit yourself to the Lord; let Him deliver him; let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.’” (22:6-8)

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And He watched His beloved chosen people spitting at Him, despising Him. The ones He had healed and fed, taught and touched - those same ones were now willing to shout insults at him.

“Yet You are He who brought me forth from the womb; You made me trust when upon my mother’s breasts. Upon You I was cast from birth; You have been my God from my mother’s womb.” (22:9,10)

And what did He do as He faced all of this? He remembered God His Father - He remembered how God had always cared for Him and given Him reason to trust Him. He remembered the goodness of God.

“Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help. Many bulls of Bashan have encircled me. They open wide their mouth at me, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; and You lay me in the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded me; a band of evildoers has encompassed me; they pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. The look, they stare at me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” (22:11-18)

Physically, Jesus suffered intensely. David wrote this Psalm one thousand years before Jesus ever went to the cross. But God made sure David knew the right words to record so that we would know how very much Jesus suffered.

“But You, O Lord, be not far off; O You my help, hasten to my assistance. Deliver my soul from the sword, my only life from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion’s mouth; from the horns of the wild oxen You answer me.” (22:19-21)

And even through the worst of His emotional, mental, and physical suffering, where did He turn? To His Father. He cried out to the only One Who could do what must be done.

“I will tell of Your name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You. You who fear the Lord, praise Him; all you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of Israel. For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from him; but when he cried to Him for help, He heard.” (22:22-24)

God delivered Him from death - and God deserved the praise.

“From You comes my praise in the great assembly; I shall pay my vows before those who fear Him. The afflicted will eat and be satisfied; those who seek Him will praise the Lord. Let your heart live forever! All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will worship before You. For the kingdom is the Lord’s

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and He rules over the nations. All the prosperous of the earth will eat and worship. All those who go down to the dust will bow before Him, even he who cannot keep his soul alive. Posterity will serve Him; it will be told of the Lord to the coming generation. They will come and will declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has performed it.” (22:15-31)

And there was more to come. The victory of that awful time was not just a resurrection. The resurrection was the beginning. What will still happen some day as a result of the cross? There will be many more who eat and are satisfied. Many more who seek God and find Him because the risen Savior paves the way. All the peoples on the whole earth, actually, will get their chance to see and decide whether or not to believe in this Jewish Messiah. Even those who do not believe in this life will still bow before Him someday, acknowledging Who he is. A whole world full of people yet to be born would see the glorious result of the love of the suffering Savior. (see also: Psalms 132:11, Psalms 2:8&9, Psalm 89:28&29, Psalm 110)

APPLICATION:

12. How do you think this Psalm was a comfort to the disciples right after Jesus' death and resurrection?
13. How is this Psalm a comfort to you?
14. How could you use Psalm 22 to witness for Jesus today?

Not just selected prophetic passages. Not just the Psalms. Not just Psalm 22. **Every book of the Bible** points to Jesus. He is the theme of the whole Word of God. He is the center of life. He is the only reason to live. When we are thirsty, He is the water. When we are hungry, He is the bread. When it's dark, He is the light. When we suffer, He is our help. When we are lonely, He is beside us. When we stumble, He picks us up. When we are despised, He is proud of us. He is our reason to get up in the morning. Jesus is it. He is.

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<i>Topic</i>	Scripture Reference
<i>Messiah to be of the seed of the woman</i>	Genesis 3:15
<i>Messiah to be of the seed of Abraham</i>	Genesis 12:3, 18:18
<i>Messiah to be of the tribe of Judah</i>	Genesis 49:10
<i>Messiah to be of the seed of Jacob</i>	Numbers 24:17,19
<i>Messiah to be of the seed of David</i>	Psalms 132:11 Jeremiah 23:5, 33:15 Isaiah 11:10
<i>Messiah to be a prophet like Moses</i>	Deut. 18:15,19
<i>Messiah to be the Son of God</i>	Psalms 2:7 Proverbs 30:4
<i>Messiah to be raised from the dead</i>	Psalms 16:10
<i>Messiah to be crucified</i>	Psalms 22 Psalm 69:21
<i>Messiah to be betrayed by a friend</i>	Psalms 41:9
<i>Messiah ascends to heaven</i>	Psalms 68:18
<i>Homage and tribute paid to Messiah by great Kings</i>	Psalms 72:10,11
<i>Messiah to be a priest like Melchizedek</i>	Psalms 110:4
<i>Messiah to be at the right hand of God</i>	Psalms 110:1
<i>Messiah, the stone the builders rejected, to become the head</i>	Psalms 118:22,23

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<i>cornerstone</i>	Isaiah 8:14,15 Isaiah 28:16
<i>Messiah to be born of a virgin</i>	Isaiah 7:14
<i>Galilee to be the first area of Messiah's ministry</i>	Isaiah 9:1-8
<i>Messiah will be meek and mild</i>	Isaiah 42:2,3 Isaiah 53:7
<i>Messiah will minister to the Gentiles</i>	Isaiah 42:1 Isaiah 49:1,8
<i>Messiah will be smitten</i>	Isaiah 50:6
<i>The suffering Messiah brings salvation</i>	Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12
<i>The New and Everlasting Covenant</i>	Isaiah 55:3,4 Jeremiah 31:31-33
<i>Messiah, the Right Arm of God</i>	Isaiah 59:16 Isaiah 53:1
<i>Messiah as Intercessor</i>	Isaiah 59:16
<i>Two-fold Mission of the Messiah</i>	Isaiah 61:1-11
<i>Messiah will perform Miracles</i>	Isaiah 35:5,6
<i>Messiah is called "The Lord"</i>	Jeremiah 23:5,6
<i>The time of Messiah's coming</i>	Daniel 9:24-26
<i>The place of Messiah's birth</i>	Micah 5:2
<i>Messiah will enter Jerusalem on a</i>	Zechariah 9:9

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<i>donkey</i>	
<i>Messiah will be pierced</i>	Zechariah 12:10 Psalm 22:16
<i>Messiah to be forsaken by His disciples</i>	Zechariah 13:7
<i>The coming of the Holy Spirit in the days of the Messiah</i>	Joel 2:28
<i>Opposition of the nations</i>	Psalm 2:2
<i>Messiah's final victory over death</i>	Isaiah 25:8
<i>The glorious Messiah</i>	Isaiah 63:1
<i>Messiah as King</i>	Psalm 2:6-9
<i>All nations submit to Messiah's rule</i>	Isaiah 2:4
<i>The Gentiles seek the Messiah of Israel</i>	Isaiah 11:10

Week #4

What Have I Done?

Psalm 51 - Questions

“For the choir director. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.”

First, read II Samuel, chapters 11 and 12.

What are the Nine steps of repentance in Psalm 51?

1. (:1)
2. (:2&3)
3. (:4)
4. (:5-7)
5. (:8-12)
6. (:13)
7. (:14&15)
8. (:16&17)
9. (:18&19)

Week #4

What Have I Done?

Psalm 51

“For the choir director. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.”

King David was so magnificent. He was a “man after God’s heart”. He was a warrior who had killed “ten thousands”. He was brave. He was a poet and a writer. He trusted God. He led his country, Israel, to worship the One, True, God – in a way no King of Israel ever did after him.

But he had a black time in his life which we would rather not know about. It would make so much more sense if his sins had simply remained private – so that we wouldn’t have to even think about them. The problem is, that dark period of time was played out in full view of his entire nation and was recorded in the most-read book in history, the Bible. David and Bathsheba. Murder, lust, sexual sin, and the death of an innocent baby.

We won’t get the full impact of Psalms 51 until we look at what happened just before it was written, three thousand years ago...

2 Samuel 11:

¹ Then it happened in the spring, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and they destroyed the sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed at Jerusalem.

In the previous few years David had triumphed over his enemies abroad and at home, and as his armies went out for their regular spring wars – to defend and expand the kingdom – David stayed home at the palace. Maybe he was tired of fighting, or maybe he felt he had earned a little rest...but...it was unusual...Kings generally traveled with their armies, but, he was the King...he could do what he decided to do.

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2. Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance. 3So David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"

James, in his letter in the New Testament, says it best: "Then, when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin..." (James 1:15)

It started out lust - desire. A thought. "Hmmm...a beautiful woman. I could have her if I wanted her. I'm the King. I think I'll find out more about her. Hmmm. She's already someone's wife. I can't just take someone else's wife....but, I want her, and I'm the King, and I can do whatever I decide to do..."

4David sent messengers and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her; and when she had purified herself from her uncleanness, she returned to her house. 5The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, and said, "I am pregnant."

Now he had a problem. Her husband is away at war, so everyone will know this was not a legitimate child. But the real problem is not the pregnancy. The real problem is a God problem. King David, responsible for leading his people to God, had broken God's law. He had committed adultery. The best thing he could have done would have been to kneel before his God right then and confess his sin. Instead, he decides the best plan is to craftily cover up what he has done. David calls Bathsheba's husband home from the front to supposedly get a report of how things are going, and then, of course, Uriah would sleep with his wife while he was home, so by the time everyone learned of Bathsheba's pregnancy they would think it was Uriah's baby, you know, from when he came home from the front that one time...sneaky, yes....but...he's the King....

6Then David sent to Joab, saying, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." So Joab sent Uriah to David. 7When Uriah came to him, David asked concerning the welfare of Joab and the people and the state of the war. 8Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." And Uriah went out of the king's house, and a present from the king was sent out after him. 9But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. 10Now when they told David, saying, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?" 11Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in temporary shelters, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? By your life and the life of your soul, I will not do this thing." 12Then David said to Uriah, "Stay here today also, and tomorrow I will let you go." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. 13Now David called him, and he ate and drank before him, and he made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his bed with his lord's servants, but he did not go down to his house.

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Plan B. This isn't what David wanted to do at all, but ... he's the King....he has to do something.

14Now in the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. 15He had written in the letter, saying, "Place Uriah in the front line of the fiercest battle and withdraw from him, so that he may be struck down and die." 16So it was as Joab kept watch on the city, that he put Uriah at the place where he knew there were valiant men. 17The men of the city went out and fought against Joab, and some of the people among David's servants fell; and Uriah the Hittite also died.

18Then Joab sent and reported to David all the events of the war. 19He charged the messenger, saying, "When you have finished telling all the events of the war to the king, 20and if it happens that the king's wrath rises and he says to you, 'Why did you go so near to the city to fight? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall? 21'Who struck down Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? Did not a woman throw an upper millstone on him from the wall so that he died at Thebez? Why did you go so near the wall?'--then you shall say, 'Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.'" 22So the messenger departed and came and reported to David all that Joab had sent him to tell. 23The messenger said to David, "The men prevailed against us and came out against us in the field, but we pressed them as far as the entrance of the gate. 24"Moreover, the archers shot at your servants from the wall; so some of the king's servants are dead, and your servant Uriah the Hittite is also dead."

25Then David said to the messenger, "Thus you shall say to Joab, 'Do not let this thing displease you, for the sword devours one as well as another; make your battle against the city stronger and overthrow it'; and so encourage him."

Now King David is free to marry Bathsheba. The sin will be “covered up”. David has taken a bad thing and turned it into a good thing. He has protected his people and no one will ever know that their King had fallen so badly. And he has protected this unborn child - no one would ever think there was anything not perfect him or her. Things weren't done God's way, but....David was the king and kings had to do whatever they had to do to keep their kingdoms strong and functioning, right?

26Now when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. 27When the time of mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house and she became his wife; then she bore him a son. But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD.

The problem had not gone away.

2 Samuel 12

*1Then the LORD sent Nathan to David And he came to him and said,
"There were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor.
2" The rich man had a great many flocks and herds.
3" But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb
Which he bought and nourished;
And it grew up together with him and his children.
It would eat of his bread and drink of his cup and lie in his bosom,*

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*And was like a daughter to him.
4"Now a traveler came to the rich man,
And he was unwilling to take from his own flock or his own herd,
To prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him;
Rather he took the poor man's ewe lamb and prepared it for the man who had
come to him."*

Nathan, God's prophet, comes to spend time with David, God's King. They did this often. They were friends, both men of authority serving the One, True God. Nathan has a story to tell.

5Then David's anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. 6"He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion."

David is incensed at the greed and cruelty of the man in the story, and, as King, decrees the punishment which the man must receive. The man obviously did a despicable thing. It's obvious to the most casual observer.

7Nathan then said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. 8'I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these! 9'Why 'have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon. 10'Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' 11"Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes and give them to your companion, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. 12'Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun.'"

The sin is out. The deed is public. Disgrace is about to descend on the King of Israel. He's the King – he could put this prophet to death and once more hide his sin and save his reputation.

13Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD "

But he doesn't. This time he bows the knee. This time he admits the truth, no matter what admitting the truth will do to him. This time he repents.

And then he writes Psalm 51....and takes nine steps back to wholeness:

First, he turns to God.

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*1 Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness;
According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my
transgressions.*

“What have I done?” After months of refusing to think about the wickedness of his sin, David is finally brought face to face with it. He has failed miserably in trying to fix it himself, and he has probably made excuses, bolstered himself up with pride, lashed out at others, withdrawn from the company of people who love and worship God, and slid deeper and deeper into moods of unhappiness. That’s what happens when you sin and don’t admit it.

But now David takes the first step – he calls on God. Only God can take the ugliness of sin and make it right again. I can only imagine, but I am picturing David groaning with the burden of this sin, his whole body reacting in pain to the weight of guilt within him. He must have been desperate for a glimpse of God again in his life.

God knew how he felt, and what to do. (Psalm 18:4, Psalm 38)

Second: He admits his sin and asks for forgiveness. (II Cor. 7:9&10, I John 1:9)

*2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity
And cleanse me from my sin.*

*3 For I know my transgressions,
And my sin is ever before me.*

Sin has such power. It grips like no pair of pliers ever invented. And then it tangles into the rest of life and disrupts and confuses everything.

But it can be dealt with. First, turn to God, then second, fully and painfully and honestly admit exactly what the sin is. Be ruthless. Don’t whitewash any part of it. You won’t be doing yourself any favors if you sweep some of it back under the rug. It will still be there, later. It doesn’t go away on its own.

What sin needs to be admitted? Lust? Adultery? Murder? Laziness? Pride? Rebellion?

Third: He plainly faces whom he has sinned against. (Romans 1:28-32)

*4 Against You, You only, I have sinned
And done what is evil in Your sight,*

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*So that You are justified when You speak
And blameless when You judge.*

David had sinned against Bathsheba, against Uriah, against his own country, against the servants in his own household....but first of all he had sinned against God.

Any sin is an affront to Holy God. God is perfect. There is no blemish in Him. There is no hint of evil anywhere near Him. To embrace sin is like taking a nasty pile of dog poop in your hand and smearing it on a beautiful white wedding dress. It's disgusting. It makes you feel like vomiting.

Somehow we, as people, can knock most sin back to an acceptable place in life. But God can't. Sin is always ugly to Him. There are no little sins with Him.

When we sin, we make God sick, so to speak.

When we sin, we require God to rescue us, because sin holds us tightly and will never let go.

When we sin, we sin against God.

Fourth: He is honest about his condition – hopeless sinner from birth. (Psalms 14:3, 58:3)

*5Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me.
6Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being,
And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.
7Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

If David had gone to God thinking there was some spark of good within him, some way to be better on his own, the healing could never have taken place. Not one of us can come to God with our own goodness in our hand. We are sinners from the beginning.

Fifth: He asks for healing and fellowship with God to be restored. (Psalm 63:1-8)

*8Make me to hear joy and gladness,
Let the bones which You have broken rejoice.
9Hide Your face from my sins
And blot out all my iniquities.
10Create in me a clean heart, O God,*

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*And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
11 Do not cast me away from Your presence
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation
And sustain me with a willing spirit.*

Oh, to get back to that sweet time with God once again.

Sixth: He quits thinking about his needs and starts thinking about what God wants.

(Psalm 69:5&6)

*13 Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners will be converted to You.*

Let's face it. David has been selfish every step of the way. His lust for Bathsheba was all about David's needs. His murder of Uriah was all about David's needs. Even his coming desperately back to God was all about David's needs. Now it's time to realize life is all about God. God wants to reach sinners. It is David's job to get the message of God to those sinners.

Seventh: He asks God to take away the guilt. (Psalm 32:1-5)

*14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation;
Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness.
15 O Lord, open my lips,
That my mouth may declare Your praise.*

Have you ever experienced anything close to what David is going through here? If you have, then you may realize that confessing your sin and getting back into fellowship with God is wonderful, but getting rid of guilt sometimes seems to take a while. Why is that? Because the feeling of guilt can linger, and we don't always know what to do about it. What would David tell us? Ask God to take away the feeling of guilt. Once a sin is forgiven guilt is no longer necessary. Guilt was a gift given to bring David to a place of repentance. Once repentance is accomplished, guilt needs to go. Sometimes only God can do that.

In fact, when murder is involved (bloodguiltiness), it seems that deliverance can only come from God. Both Paul and Moses – great men of God – would have known this. Taking a human life instills such a deep guilt that only God, by His grace, can remove it.

Eighth: He offers a gift to God. (Psalm 50:9-14)

*16For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it;
You are not pleased with burnt offering.
17The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.*

But not the gift you would think. Not all his worldly possessions. Not his favorite treasure. Not his unborn children. Not some sacrifice of suffering.

Just a broken heart. That's the gift God wants.

Ninth: He gets back to the work of God, humbly accepting that the scars of sin will probably remain. (Matt. 28:19&20)

*18By Your favor do good to Zion;
Build the walls of Jerusalem.
19Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices,
In burnt offering and whole burnt offering;
Then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.*

Get back to being King. Get back to being a Mom. Get back to being a husband. Get back to work. Some of the scars of your sin may make it impossible to do the things you always thought you would do, but that doesn't mean God has changed what He wants you to do. Accept the fact that life may be different because of your sin, but don't sit around feeling sorry for yourself. Get back to work.

Here's the rest of the story:

And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die. 14"However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die." 15So Nathan went to his house.

David was forgiven and restored to a sweet relationship with God. But sin has consequences. Innocent people were going to suffer horribly because of the very public sin of the great King David. You've heard the saying: "The bigger they are, the harder they fall". The fall was going to be so very hard.

16David therefore inquired of God for the child; and David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground.

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David knows what Nathan said would happen. But he also trusts in the faithfulness of God, and knows that God has mercy. He pleads for the life of the innocent child who will never get to live life because of David's sin.

17The elders of his household stood beside him in order to raise him up from the ground, but he was unwilling and would not eat food with them. 18Then it happened on the seventh day that the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said, "Behold, while the child was still alive, we spoke to him and he did not listen to our voice. How then can we tell him that the child is dead, since he might do himself harm!"

The servants thought, "If King David was so very distraught when the child was still alive, what will he do when he hears the child has died?"

19But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David perceived that the child was dead; so David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" And they said, "He is dead." 20So David arose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he came into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he came to his own house, and when he requested, they set food before him and he ate. 21Then his servants said to him, "What is this thing that you have done? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept; but when the child died, you arose and ate food." 22He said, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows, the LORD may be gracious to me, that the child may live.' 23"But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again?"

He gave it all he had. And then he accepted what God had decided. He accepted and trusted God. God had the right to do what He did – and God knew best.

I will go to him, but he will not return to me."

David had calm assurance that the child was with God in heaven, and that he would see him someday. Anyone who has ever had a miscarriage or lost a baby can take great comfort from those words.

24Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her; and she gave birth to a son, and he named him Solomon. Now the LORD loved him 25and sent word through Nathan the prophet, and he named him Jedidiah for the Lord's sake."

Jedidiah means "beloved of the Lord".

"What Have I Done?" Have you ever been brought to your knees by that question? Has your heart ever dropped to the floor with the memory of a past sin which has never been confessed to God?

You are beloved of the Lord. Take the first step. Go to Him – He knows what to do.

How Do I Help from Psalm 51?

(Find answers to these situations in Psalm 51)

1. A friend has confided in you that she stole \$100 worth of merchandise as a teenager. She has never told anyone about it until now...no one ever discovered it at the time, but now, as a Christian, she feels terrible guilt about it that just seems to grow and grow. Every time she opens her Bible to read, she thinks about this sin from so many years ago. How do you help?
2. Your old high school friend and you have gotten together for a cup of coffee. You haven't seen each other in 15 years. She confides in you that she had an affair 2 years ago. Everyone found out about it eventually, and she, as a Christian, asked for forgiveness from God and from her husband. Their marriage is still together, but the guilt she feels about this sin is destroying her. She knows God has forgiven her, but she still feels unbearable guilt. How do you help?
3. Your sister does not know the Lord. You have witnessed to her and witnessed to her, but she never seems even the least bit interested. Recently you discovered she had an abortion as a teenager – you had never known about it. Your own reaction to this new information is that you are sad for the child you would never get to know, and angry at her for doing it. How can you sort out your own feelings and also be a witness to her?
4. A co-worker is devastated because her son, who had been involved in drugs, has committed a murder. She feels guilty because she wonders if she is the one to blame for his downward slide. She wants to help her son, but isn't sure what to do. She also just wants to run away from the whole situation – not even visit him in jail at all. How do you help?

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5. You have been witnessing to someone and feel like you've hit a stone wall. This person disagrees with your statement that she has a sin nature. She is offended that you would think she is a sinner, when she hasn't done anything all that horrible in her whole life. What do you say next?

6. Someone you know at church is always talking about her past sins. It seems like she almost takes pleasure in sharing all the intimate details of sins which no one really wants to hear about. Is it ever right to just keep past sins to yourself?

7. You heard about a preacher who was caught stealing from a local department store. Everyone in the town is shocked that this could happen. His church has asked him to step down from his position. You are confused. Shouldn't he get a chance to be forgiven and go on like before? How could his church do this to him?

8. A friend of yours is mad at God. She really slipped up as a teenager and got into sex and drugs and a whole lot of bad stuff. Now she is mad at God because her life is a mess and getting worse. How can you help?

9. You know a woman who walked out on her husband and family 2 years ago. She was stressed out and said she just couldn't take any more of the financial pressure and responsibility of raising two children. She's sorry now that she did it, but doesn't know if she could take the heartbreak of going back and having them tell her she no longer has a place in their lives. What should she do?

10. If you had been advising President Clinton about his very public sin a few years ago, what would you have said?

Week #5

Approaching the Throne

Psalms 120 – 134 - Questions

(The Psalms of Ascent)

The Psalms of Ascent were sung three times a year as the Jews traveled to Jerusalem for their three holidays: Passover, Shavuot, and Tabernacles. What do you think each Psalm is teaching the travelers as they approached the temple – the dwelling place of God?

Psalm 120

Psalm 121

Psalm 122

Psalm 123

Psalm 124

Psalm 125

Psalm 126

Psalm 127

Psalm 128

Psalm 129

Psalm 130

Psalm 131

Psalm 132

Psalm 133

Psalm 134

Week #5

Approaching the Throne

Psalms 120 – 134 - Discussion Notes
(The Psalms of Ascent)

Two thousand years before Jesus Christ ever came into our world He chose Abraham to be the Father of the Jewish nation. He promised him that he would give him so many descendants they would be innumerable, like the sand of the sea. He promised him a land which would belong to his people as long as the sun and the moon existed. And He promised him the Savior of the world would come from him, someday.

But God's promises seemed to take so long to come to pass! Abraham obediently left the home of his fathers and traveled in the direction God pointed, not sure how long it would be before he saw the land God had promised. He obediently waited for a son. And waited. And waited. And waited. His wife, Sarah, was barren, and the promised innumerable descendants seemed an impossible goal to reach. And if there were no son for Abraham, then how could the Lord God bring a Savior? No son – no Savior.

Throughout those long years of waiting and watching, camping in one place after another, Abraham learned to know this God who had tagged him to do this impossible job. And he began to love and trust this wonderful God in a way no man had ever found possible before.

Abraham died having seen the land God promised. And he died having seen and loved the son God promised. But he never saw the Savior. And he realized, after all that time getting to know his Lord, that there was much, much more to look forward to, in eternity – and that's where his heart was pointing him as he breathed his last, not yet having seen all the promises kept.

The descendants of Abraham did, indeed, become numerous. They were forced by a famine to leave the land the Lord had given them, and went into Egypt. And when life became unbearable for them under the hard hand of the Egyptians, they cried out to God and He heard them. He gave them a leader, Moses, who, trembling and uncertain, trusted God and rescued his people from their cruel landlords.

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The descendants of Abraham were poor travelers. They whined and complained and made life miserable for their leader, Moses, and yet the Lord brought them back to the land He had given them, and their children learned to love it as Abraham had.

During the long trip back to Israel, the children of Abraham were given laws by their God. Laws which would make them one and would place them on the world's stage as the example for all to see what this Holy God was like, and how to approach Him.

He was not to be approached casually, oh no. He was Holy and perfect, and desired perfection in His people. Demanded it, in fact. No one was allowed to enter the presence of this Holy God with any sin dirtying up his/her life. None at all.

Moses and the descendants of Abraham learned pretty fast that there was no way to stay perfect. They might sin, ask for forgiveness, offer a perfect little animal as a sacrifice for that sin, and feel cleansed, forgiven and perfect for just a few moments, but then sin would rear its ugly head again, and the whole process must be repeated. Sin was so much a part of their human nature that they could never get ahead of it. It was endless...and would have been hopeless...except for the fact that they remembered what God had promised Abraham – the promise which had not yet been fulfilled – that a Savior was coming from the seed of Abraham. That Savior was going to be able to take care of their sin problem forever. Every Jewish person who walked on planet earth, from the time of Abraham until the time when that Savior finally came, could at least look forward in faith to a time when God would keep His promise and the Messiah would come. That hope made life bearable – and held a promise for a future which would be much better.

After Moses died, another great man, Joshua, led the descendants of Abraham back into the land they had left 400 years before. They lived in the land and pushed out many of the squatters who had occupied their land since the time they left. The only real government the Jews had after Joshua was the occasional strong and mighty warrior who had the wisdom to lead the people and fight back their enemies. These men (and one woman) were called the Judges of Israel.

After the Judges the Lord God gave them Kings. King Saul, King David, King Solomon, and so on...some who served and loved the Lord God, some who did not. After about 500 years of Kings, the descendants of Abraham had a land (although they fought one another constantly), a capital city (Jerusalem – although some of them didn't like the choice of Jerusalem and decided to do their own thing), and a temple (although not all of them wanted to worship in that temple). They were a dysfunctional, sinful bunch of unthankful people who very seldom had moments of trusting God. (sound familiar?)

God had given them the law to live by, but they couldn't do it. He had told them how very much He wanted to love them and know them, but they disobeyed so constantly it was nearly impossible to even remember that love.

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Three times a year the descendants of Abraham had national Holidays, which they were supposed to enjoy together in the city of Jerusalem. In the spring they celebrated Passover (remembering how God had freed them from slavery in Egypt). In the summer they celebrated Shavuot (remembering how God feeds and takes care of them and supplies the harvests they needed). And in the fall they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles (remembering that some day God would “tabernacle”, or live, with them once again, just like He had with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden).

But they stopped going up to Jerusalem, they stopped worshipping God in the temple, they stopped raising their children to know and love the One, True God. They were just too comfortable to be asked to travel three times a year to Jerusalem. They were too involved in making life work to remember how much their God desired their presence at His temple. And when they did go, it was very seldom about Him. It was always about them.

He loved them too much to let them go on like this, so he opened the door for their enemies to capture them and carry them away from their land, their capital, their temple.

For seventy years the displaced Jews remembered what they had left behind, and their hearts were broken. They longed for their land. They longed for their city, Jerusalem, and they longed for a place to worship their God. But most of all they understood how far they had wandered away from that God, and they longed to know Him again.

As if by miracle, the descendants of Abraham were released from their captors after seventy years, and made their way back to and broken down, barren Israel. But it was the home the Lord God had given to their father, Abraham, and they loved it. They returned to a capital city, Jerusalem, in ruins, but they rebuilt it. And the temple they remembered had been razed to the ground, but they worshipped God there, anyway. They were home.

As strong men of God...Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah and Ezra...obeyed God and did the tasks God had given to them, the descendants of Abraham repopulated the land of Israel, and re-instituted temple worship. Once again they traveled three times a year to Jerusalem, this time with a new bounce in their step.

And when they pulled together into one place all the scrolls which were their Holy Scriptures, the Psalms were in many pieces, scattered here and there, kept safe, but not organized. Again, strong men of God, not warriors this time, but organizers, compiled the scriptures into books and collections.

One set of Psalms were put together and called the “Songs of Ascent”. These were the songs the traveling descendants of Abraham would sing as they walked up to Jerusalem three times a year, for their festivals. Jews from northern Israel would start out first, of course, because they had the farthest distance to go. As they walked the dusty roads up to their capital city, more and more would join them. Whole families grouped together

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and welcomed other families from cities along the way. Sometimes they would know each other, sometimes not – but always they knew the same songs. The “Songs of Ascent”. They were, together, going “Up to Jerusalem”. Up into the mountains which surrounded the city of God. Up to the temple. Up to the throne of God.

Today’s lesson is going to look at each of these fifteen short psalms, and ask a simple question of each: **What do you think each Psalm taught the travelers as they approached the temple – the dwelling place of God?**

Psalm 120 – My heart yearns for God when I realize what a sinful and ugly land I have been carried away to. This is not my home. I want to go home.

Psalm 121 – I lift up my eyes and realize Jerusalem is the place I am longing for. I am sick within because of how much I want to be where God is...how much I want to do things God’s way again. God will take care of me until I can get back home.

Psalm 122 – Here I am! My feet are standing in Jerusalem again! Pray for peace for this city. Peace does not exist in the world unless it exists in the city of God.

Psalm 123- OK, Jerusalem is not perfect, but here I find You! Our enemies still surround us, but if we can see God, it is worth it to be here.

Psalm 124 – Just think about all God has done for us in the past. Remember how He has never left us alone?

Psalm 125 – Just like Jerusalem is nestled in the middle of the mountains, so we are nestled in the middle of Your care for us, O Lord. I feel so safe here.

Psalm 126 – We were filled with sorrow in a foreign land, but now we are laughing! Help us remember that laughter, O Lord, help us remember that laughter follows tears when we are always heading towards You!

Psalm 127 – Help us to remember that unless You are the focus of what we do, unless You are directing our paths, we are fruitless.

Psalm 128 – I love being a child of God!!!! I love it!!!! It is so amazing, so wonderful, so much better than anything else I can imagine!!!!

Psalm 129 – We do still have enemies. But we don’t have to keep our eyes on them. We don’t have to be afraid. God is fighting them for us. He always has. He always will.

Psalm 130 – Of all the things I think I need in life, the one thing I truly must have is You! I will wait for You as long as it takes. Do things in Your time, my God, just like you did for Abraham. For You I will wait forever.

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Psalm 131 – I will settle down all my worries and fears. I will cuddle up to You.

Psalm 132 – You have given me a job to do. I will do it. I make a firm commitment to make Your needs more important than mine.

Psalm 133 – I long greatly to walk together with my fellow believers as we serve You together. How pleasant it is to have company on this walk.

Psalm 134 – As the sun sets and I approach Jerusalem, I am reminded that even when I sleep this evening there are believers in You who will continue the praise through the night. Those who serve in the temple will not slumber nor sleep. They will take their turns singing the songs of God.

The descendants of Abraham did finally see the promise of God come true. The Savior came. He, like many of His fellow Jews, traveled to Jerusalem three times a year and sang these same songs. Most of the descendants of Abraham did not accept their Messiah when He came 2,000 years ago. They rejected the One they had been waiting for and singing about – because they had again become a people who were all about themselves, and not about God.

Because of their rejection, you and I have our chance to approach the throne of God. The Good News of the Messiah of Israel was brought to us, who didn't descend from Abraham, and it is ours to spread until the day He returns.

As we approach God's throne, not in Jerusalem, but in the temple in our hearts, what do these Psalms have to say to us? Do we learn anything from the Psalms of Ascent which will keep our feet walking back to Him not three times a year, but every day?

Some day all the descendants of Abraham, the Jews, will once again come eagerly to the throne of God. Do you see anything in these Psalms of Ascent which will help them as they come, broken and with tears streaming down their faces, to the One they were made to love and serve for eternity?

I hope you enjoyed this collection of Selected Psalms, and that you will take something of the Psalms with you into the rest of your life. Start every morning in the Word of God. End every evening with praise. Think often of the God who made you to know Him. Never forget what Jesus did on the cross for you. When you sin, coming weeping back into the arms of your Savior. And sing songs of ascent as you approach the throne.

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