

# **Reasons to Celebrate**

## ***Studies from the Book of Psalms***

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## Foreword

*Welcome to this life-enriching seminar for men and women who already know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and others who may be seeking Him.*

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# Reasons to Celebrate

## *Studies from the Book of Psalms*

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## *Reasons to Celebrate Studies from the Book of Psalms*

### *Before you begin . . .*

Over the centuries, no other piece of ancient literature has held such attraction to the human heart as the Book of Psalms. Even though the songs and poems which comprise this book were written between 1500 and 450 B.C., they still stimulate genuine praise toward God and give comfort to people all over the world today.

Psalms went through many revisions before final compilation some time after the Jewish exile. David is generally ascribed with authorship of at least 73 psalms, the Levitical clans of Asaph and Korah with 23, Solomon with two, and Heman, Ethan and Moses, one each. This leaves 49 psalms with uncertain authorship. While the Old Testament books of Genesis through Esther record the history of God's revelation to Israel, the Psalms record Israel's response to God's revelation. It must be remembered, however, that these writings were inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:16), making the Psalms also God's revelation of His true character to us.

The writers of the Psalms addressed issues in the various periods in which they lived, dealt with all kinds of life circumstances, and displayed many different responses toward God. They talked to God about everything happening in their lives and responded to Him with their deepest emotions. Their authentic application of religious experience to daily life gives the Psalms a timeless quality. The Book of Psalms opens the heart toward true communion with God. And this, as we will see in our study, gives enduring reasons to celebrate.

Celebration seems to be a need of the heart. Our hearts yearn to rejoice about something. We each set out on a human pilgrimage seeking

happiness in the experiences of life. But we all eventually come to the realization that life does not always unfold as we imagine. There comes a day for all of us when we realize exciting plans or hopes don't always come true, or if they do, the satisfaction is only temporary. It is easy for us to become immersed in discontent, regrets, disappointment, and resentment toward God, other people and ourselves. These powerful feelings can completely drain a spirit of celebration out of our lives.

The Psalms were written by real people who experienced all of these feelings. They struggled with resentments, failure, fear, confusion, despair, anger, hurt, and much disappointment. But as they took these feelings to God, He gave them new hope and lasting reasons to celebrate even amid the discouragements of life. Through these beautiful songs and poems of antiquity, we will discover that the reasons God gives us to celebrate, far from being stolen by the disappointments of life, are often discovered and embraced most deeply in times of hardship.

As we embark on our study in the Psalms, we will be looking for reasons to rejoice that stand the test of time and provide present help and future hope; reasons to celebrate that fulfill the human heart at its place of deepest need.

## **Lesson 1**

### ***REASON TO CELEBRATE I: WE ARE NEVER ALONE***

Loneliness is one of the great thieves of joy in life. The words, "No man is an island," apply to individuals in varying degrees according to personality. But the fact remains that we all have a need for intimate companionship. Loneliness has no favorites: a person can be married or single, live in a big city or rural setting, be young or old and still experience loneliness. This is because loneliness has little to do with these specifics of life. Loneliness stems from the need of each individual to be appreciated for their strengths and loved in spite of their weaknesses by at least one person. For the human heart, understanding and unconditional love are as necessary to emotional health as food and water are to physical well-being.

Many look to family, friendships or perhaps social affirmation to fill the need for love and recognition. But God created the human heart for a deeper companionship that only a relationship with Him can provide. The French physicist and philosopher Pascal addressed this need when he said, "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which only God can fill through His Son, Jesus Christ." Along with the rest of Scripture, the Psalms declare that the Lord waits in longing to fulfill this deepest need of the human heart.

In the context of these truths, the first reason to celebrate is that we are never alone. Proverbs 18:24 says, "There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." The Psalms declare that God is near to care, to understand, and to quench our thirst for unconditional love and companionship. We will begin our study in the Psalms with reflections on this wonderful truth.

1. What factors make loneliness a significant problem in our society?

2. What negative ways do people seek to escape loneliness?

3. What needs of the heart are associated with feelings of loneliness?

4. a. Through His Word, God reveals He is omnipresent (everywhere present) and omniscient (knows everything). This means God is always with us and knows us intimately. How do the following verses describe this truth? Psalm 139:1-4, 7-10

***Additional references:*** Proverbs 15:3; Jeremiah 23:24

b. Why are these truths about God uncomfortable for some?

c. Why is God's presence and knowledge comforting to others?

d. What must a person first grasp about God in order to long for closeness to Him?

Psalm 86:15

**Reference:** A. W. Tozer excerpt, p. 10-11.

5. a. What needs of the heart do these psalms refer to which can be met by closeness to God?

Psalm 34:18

Psalm 139:17-18

Psalm 117:2 (86:5)

Psalm 147:5b



b. The nearness of God can dispel the hopelessness and fears of the future generated by loneliness. What do the following Scriptures promise?

Psalm 73:24 (48:14)

Psalm 121

Psalm 16:7-11

6. a. The Psalms model honesty with God and encourage us to come to Him for help without reservation. What points did the psalmist make as he asked God for help?

Psalm 86:1-7

Psalm 40:11-13

b. How did David describe the result of honestly asking for God's help?  
Psalm 40:1-3

c. What is God's promise in Psalm 91:15?

*Additional verses:* Isaiah 65:24; Jeremiah 33:3

7. Just because God is near does not mean we will experience the benefits of His presence. As in a crowded bus, we may be close physically to people, but not know them. According to the Psalms, what choices must we continually make in order to nurture close companionship to God?

Psalm 16:8

Psalm 40:8

Psalm 73:28

Psalm 86:11

Psalm 105:3-4

Psalm 145:18

## **SUMMARY**

8. Why is the presence of God a reason to celebrate? What can He provide for you that no one and nothing else can?

9. What must you do to experience the joy and strength of God's presence in your life?

10. Is there a particular situation in your life today about which you have not honestly prayed? What can you expect as you share with God your deepest feelings and desires about this situation?

Excerpt from "**God is Easy to Live With**" by A. W. Tozer

It is most important to our spiritual welfare that we hold in our minds always a right conception of God. If we think of Him as cold and exacting we shall find it impossible to love Him, and our lives will be ridden with servile fear. If, again, we hold Him to be kind and understanding our whole inner life will mirror that idea.

The truth is that God is the most winsome of all beings and His service one of unspeakable pleasure. He is all love, and those who trust Him need never know anything but that love. He is just, indeed, and He will not condone sin; but through the blood of the everlasting covenant He is able to act toward us exactly as if we had never sinned. Toward the trusting sons of men His mercy will always triumph over justice.

The fellowship of God is delightful beyond all telling. He communes with His redeemed ones in an easy, uninhibited fellowship that is restful and healing to the soul. He is not sensitive nor selfish nor temperamental. What He is today we shall find Him tomorrow and the next day and the next year. He is not hard to please, though He may be hard to satisfy. He expects of us only what He has Himself first supplied. He is quick to overlook imperfections when He knows we meant to do His will. He loves us for ourselves and values our love more than galaxies of new created worlds.

How good it would be if we could learn that God is easy to live with. He remembers our frame and knows that we are dust.

Some of us are religiously jumpy and self-conscious because we know that God sees our every thought and is acquainted with all our ways. We need not be. God is the sum of all patience and the essence of kindly good will. We please Him most, not by frantically trying to make ourselves good, but by throwing ourselves into His arms with all our imperfections, and believing that He understands everything and loves us still.

## **A Final Note**

While the Lord is everywhere present, He is a gentleman and waits to be invited to share His life with us on a heart level. The New Testament explains that a personal relationship with God begins with faith in His Son, Jesus Christ (John 1:12, 14:6). In Revelation 3:20, Jesus states His desire to have fellowship with us: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."

If your desire is to open the door of your life to Jesus, the following prayer may help you express this desire to Him:

*Lord Jesus, I open the door of my life to you. Please forgive the sin that makes me feel awkward in your presence. Thank you that this is possible because of the cross where you paid the penalty for my sin. Help me begin to know and experience the joy of your presence. Amen.*

**References:** *Romans 3:23-26; 6:23; Colossians 2:13-14.*



## Lesson 2

### ***REASON TO CELEBRATE II: THE CERTAINTY OF GOD'S WORD***

One of the celebration themes of the Psalms is that God has given us clear answers to life's hardest questions in His Word, the Bible. While He did not have to make Himself known to His creatures, God has chosen to reveal to us who He is and what our relationship with Him can be. The Scriptures also give us concrete wisdom about life's choices. Amid a world of uncertainty and changing philosophies, the Bible is the sure guide for life we all need. Through His Word, God provides us with principles which enable us to experience fulfillment here and now and in the life hereafter. These aspects of God's revelation alone can provide for all our deepest needs.

The Bible, written by human authors whose words and thoughts were inspired by God (2 Peter 1:20-21), has stood the test of time like no other publication. Its 66 books were written by some 40 authors over a 1,500-year period in three languages on three continents. These authors for the most part did not know one another, and they varied greatly in occupation (i.e., Luke, a physician; Amos, a farmer; David, a king) and education (Peter, a fisherman probably with little education, and Moses, schooled in Egypt's finest institutions of learning). Even with these enormous variables, the Bible unfolds in an orderly fashion from beginning to end and exhibits one theme throughout: redemption.<sup>1</sup> God, who made us intellectual beings, has given us enough logic in these facts alone to trust the Scriptures as His words, not man's.

Handling life in all its complexity and change is difficult. Youth looks for a magic day when the difficulties of life are conquered while maturity recognizes that life never does become easy. We can take the hand of God to walk through life, and faith in Him can lift us above the circumstances. But our hand only reaches God's as we hear and embrace

His words to us in the Bible. As we receive and trust God's Word, He leads us to the spiritual health and freedom that brings rest amid life's circumstances.

This is news worth celebrating! The psalmist wrote, "I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free" (Psalm 119:16, 32). In our second study on *Reasons to Celebrate*, we will look at the wonderful gift of God's Word.

1. What is the result of looking for understanding about God and life apart from the Bible?

2. Read Psalm 19:7-11. What adjectives or phrases describe God's Word (or laws) and the benefits of embracing godly principles?

3. How does Psalm 33:6-9 describe the power of God's Word?

4. a. John 1 describes Jesus Christ as the "Word" of God incarnate. What do these verses tell us about Jesus?

John 1:1, 3, 14



b. What does Colossians 1:16-17 add to this description of Christ?

5. According to Jesus' parable in Matthew 13:18-23 (cf. 13:3-8), what can keep God's Word from taking root in our lives?

6. a. How do the following verses describe the type of response to God's Word that brings the greatest blessing?

1 Thessalonians 2:13

Psalm 119:11, 97 (Deuteronomy 6:6-8)

b. What other decisions do the Scriptures encourage us to make regarding God's Word?

Psalm 119:36-37

Psalm 119:127-128

Psalm 130:5

7. What do these verses declare about God's Word?

Psalm 111:7-8

Psalm 119:89, 152, 160

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Hebrews 4:12 (Psalm 119:96)

8. a. It is important to remember that God has spoken to us in His Word primarily to draw us to a loving relationship with Him. While knowledge of the Bible is valuable, it is no substitute for intimacy with the living Lord. The psalmist trusted God's Word because he knew

God's character. List the attributes of God the psalmist mentions that encourage us to freely and frequently come to God as our very best friend.

Psalm 119:64a

Psalm 119:68a

Psalm 119:73a

Psalm 119:90

Psalm 119:114a

Psalm 119:132

Psalm 119:168b

b. The following verses capture the beauty of the psalmist's relationship with the Lord. How would you describe this relationship?

Psalm 119:145-149

9. The more we comprehend God's gracious character, the more certain we become that His Word is a gift to celebrate, a sure foundation upon which to build our lives. Summarize the benefits we will experience as we submit to God's way from a heart of trust.

Psalm 119:9, 11

Psalm 119:29

Psalm 119:24, 105

Psalm 119:28, 50

Psalm 119:92-93

Psalm 119:32, 45

Psalm 119:165

## **SUMMARY**

10. a. The Bible has been called God's love letter to us. What is the primary purpose of God's Word?

b. How does your perception of God's character affect your trust in His Word? How does God's character help you trust the Bible?

11. a. What decisions about God's Word do you want to make on a daily basis and why?

b. What obstacles to God's Word taking root in your life do you want to avoid?

12. What needs does God desire to meet in your life through His Word? Why is the certainty of His Word a reason to celebrate?

## **LESSON 2 NOTES**

**1** *Redemption.* "The concept of redemption can only be fully understood by glimpsing the biblical context of human beings held captive by the power of forces they cannot defeat. Only through intervention can that slavery be broken and freedom accomplished, often by paying a ransom. In the Old Testament, God intervened on behalf of Israel, taking the initiative in the great redemptive event from Egypt, the exodus (see Genesis 15:13-14; Exodus 1:11-14; 12:31-42; Psalm 105:23-39), where the goal was the enjoyment of life in the promised land. References in the Old Testament to redemption from sin point forward to the redemption from sin accomplished in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:24; Colossians 1:13-14). Though in the human arena

freedom can be purchased through money, no human being can break the bondage of another human being to sin. No person can redeem another human being. We are all slaves to sin. Christ, however, paid the ransom with His blood, His death (Exodus 12:12-13; Leviticus 11, 14; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Timothy 2:6). The goal of our redemption is to enjoy freedom from the guilt and power of sin and to live a life of service that reflects our new standing (Romans 3:24; 6:7,22; Galatians 5:1,13; 1 Peter 2:16). The goal will be fully achieved only at the resurrection on the last day (Romans 8:23; Ephesians 1:14)." *The NIV Topical Study Bible*, pp. 137-138, 1391.





## Lesson 3

### ***FULLY KNOWN AND FULLY LOVED I: SURE FOUNDATIONS FOR SELF WORTH***

One of the most painful problems that the human heart can experience is low self-esteem. We are painfully aware of our imperfections, and this awareness constantly undermines our sense of self worth. In response to these feelings, some try harder to achieve perfection while others give up and rebel against any standards. But whether we are a conformist or a nonconformist, we all fear the same thing: that if people see who we really are, they will reject us. To avoid this pain, the conformist tries very hard to hide his weaknesses from other people. The nonconformist, on the other hand, seeks approval in the nonconforming crowd, still hiding his deep sense of inadequacy. Both responses to feelings of low self worth build barriers that keep people from the unconditionally loving relationships they need to thrive in life.

The truth is, we are all imperfect people, wounded and scarred by our own mistakes and the mistakes of others. Perfection is an illusion that will never overcome feelings of personal dissatisfaction. Neither will rebellion against standards. Self worth must be established in spite of our imperfection and in the midst of an imperfect world.

The good news is that God provides this firm foundation our self worth in the context of His unconditional love. As we grow to understand the value He places on our individual lives and the forgiveness He offers when we come to Him with our failures, we can learn to extend that forgiveness and love to ourselves and others. Self worth established in this way will meet the heart's deep need to love and be loved, despite our imperfections.

As wounded people, we all need the healing that comes from the love of God so beautifully described in the Psalms. To grasp His love,

acceptance, and forgiveness is to find freedom from the painful feelings of inadequacy and isolation related to low self-esteem. This is reason to celebrate! As we continue our study of the Psalms, we will look at the lasting foundations for self worth found in God's gracious acceptance and unconditional love of His children.

1. Where do feelings of low self-esteem originate? What does our culture say makes us valuable as people?

2. a. What are some ways people attempt to overcome a sense of low self-esteem?

b. Why do these attempts ultimately fail?

3. What does healthy self-esteem produce in a person's life?

4. What do the following verses reveal about God's care for us and our worth to Him?

Psalm 139:13-16

Psalm 139:17-18

Psalm 139:1-4

Psalm 139:9-10

Psalm 121:3, 7-8

5. a. Being loved by God, the creator and ruler of the universe, makes us individuals of great worth. What is the nature of God's love toward us according to these psalms?

Psalm 36:5, 7-9

Psalm 117:2

**Note:** *fear* of the Lord refers to reverent trust based on a relationship of love.

b. How does 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a describe God's perfect love toward us?

6. a. Why did the psalmist find God's love so amazing in Psalm 8:3-4?

b. How does God declare our worth within the context of His marvelous creation according to Psalm 8:5-8?

7. According to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 16:26, what value does God place on a human soul?

8. The greatest testimony of our worth to God is found in the sacrificial giving of His Son for our redemption. Of what do the following verses remind us?

John 3:16

Romans 5:8

**Reference:** Note 1, *Redemption*, p. 22.

9. How do the following verses describe the transformation which begins when we choose to receive God's gift of redemption through Christ?

John 1:12

John 3:6-8 (Titus 3:5)

Ezekiel 36:26-27

2 Corinthians 5:17

10. a. What do the Scriptures promise about the Spirit of God and our weaknesses?

Romans 8:26a

Ephesians 3:16, 20

b. When we seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit, how do the results affect our self-image?

Galatians 5:22-23

**Reference:** Note 1, *Holy Spirit*, p. 35.

11. When we suffer feelings of inadequacy or failure, where can we put our confidence?

Psalms 73:26

2 Corinthians 3:5

2 Corinthians 12:9

Romans 8:28

12. a. In order to experience the self worth that comes from God's love, our relationship with God must have first place in our lives. What attitudes and choices allow us to experience God's love and comprehend our worth to Him?

Psalm 63:8

Psalm 105:4

Psalm 13:5-6

b. Optional: Mistaken trusts can keep us from walking closely with God and experiencing His love. Where must we avoid putting our trust?  
Psalm 49:13

Psalm 49:6

Psalm 118:8-9

13. a. We can lose sight of God's love when we doubt His plans for our lives. In spite of his circumstances, what attitudes about God's plans sustained David's sense of God's faithfulness and love?

Psalm 18:30a, 32

b. What does the Lord promise to those who look to Him in faith, regardless of circumstances or feelings?

Jeremiah 29:11



14. Deep roots of low self-esteem may take time to overcome. As we continually place our lives in God's hands, however, He works steadily to bring about the healing we need. How do these verses describe the healing He brings?

Psalm 40:2-3

Psalm 56:13 (Malachi 4:2)

## **SUMMARY**

15. What have you learned about the value God places on your life?

16. How would you describe God's love for you?

17. Why is your worth in God's eyes and God's love for you a strong basis for loving yourself in spite of your imperfections?

18. How can an understanding of God's love for you and your worth in His eyes affect your relationships with others?

19. a. Why does receiving Christ play such an important part in the process of developing a healthy sense of self worth?

b. How does the Holy Spirit help build your self worth?

**Reference:** Note 1, The *Holy Spirit*, p. 35.

20. Has anything in your life been keeping you from experiencing God's love? What is your desire?

21. Psalm 37:4 promises that when we put God first in our lives, He will give us the desires of our hearts. What is your desire with regard to your comprehension of God's love? What is your desire with regard to your sense of self worth?

## LESSON 3 NOTES

**1** The *Holy Spirit*. God has made Himself known in the Bible as a Trinity; three divine persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), all with the same essence of deity. The Holy Spirit, known as the Third Person of the Trinity, indwells every person who personally receives Christ (John 1:12; 14:16-17). The Scriptures reveal the Holy Spirit not as an "it," but rather as a "He," a distinct personality. In John 3, Jesus tells Nicodemus that the Holy Spirit is the member of the Trinity who brings about regeneration or spiritual birth in the believer. While the Holy Spirit cannot be seen, we can see the evidence of His work (3:8). The Scriptures further tell us that when we ask God (Luke 11:13) to "fill" us with His Spirit (Ephesians 5:18b), He responds by supernaturally instructing and empowering us to live the Christian life (Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 3:16-20; Ezekiel 36:26-27). Sometimes the Bible refers to this as "Christ in you" (Colossians 1:27b).



## Lesson 4

### ***FULLY KNOWN AND FULLY LOVED II: THE FREEDOM OF FORGIVENESS***

One of the great destroyers of self-esteem is unresolved guilt. Whether true or false guilt, this emotion can govern our lives from morning until night. While guilt can provide motivation for change that needs to take place, it can also cause serious problems if we do not know how to deal with it constructively. Mental health institutions and prisons are filled with people whose lives have been ravaged by unresolved guilt.

The world's answers to guilt cannot provide the freedom from guilt we need. A prevalent answer to guilt in modern psychology is to pretend we are not guilty, placing blame on others for our wrong actions or embracing relativistic thinking that denies moral absolutes. However, as hard as we may try to deny guilt, our hearts know the truth, and we continue to live with a defensive rather than a forgiven spirit.

False guilt, on the other hand, caused by people foisting their expectations on us or from unrealistic expectations we place on ourselves, can drive us to the breaking point as quickly as true guilt. False guilt motivates us to take responsibility which is not ours and to blame ourselves for the wrong choices of others. False guilt<sup>1</sup> can cause us to live with a sense of defeat, despair and worthlessness as we cripple ourselves and others by enabling unhealthy behavior. These are common results when we handle the powerful emotion of guilt in our own wisdom.

However, the Bible shows us how to deal with guilt feelings to prevent them from ruining our self-image or ruling our lives. As we grow in our relationship with the Lord, He helps us learn to identify false guilt and

resolve true guilt. The Psalms in particular show the Lord's way to cleansing from sin, the "washing" on the inside that frees us from harboring unresolved guilt.

David, the author of at least 73 psalms, was the instrument God used to impart wisdom about dealing with guilt. David, described by God as a "man after His own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14), at one time in his life became self-sufficient and disregarded God's leadership. As David followed his own desires, he committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of Israel's loyal soldiers who was away at the battlefield. When Bathsheba became pregnant and David could not hide his crime, he arranged for Uriah to die on the front lines of battle. He then married Bathsheba.

Whether one feels for David or casts a critical eye, God used David's story to exhibit the power of His forgiveness in our own lives. The first lesson to be learned is that hiding guilt is no way out of guilt's bondage. Attempting to hide his sin did not quench the fire of burning guilt within David or lessen the terrible rippling effects of his wrong choices within his family and the nation of Israel. Indeed, the guilt David sought to hide has been revisited by millions throughout history. But through the psalms David penned about his experience, God has shown us the healthy way to handle guilt and find freedom in God's forgiveness and grace.

The Psalms declare that God has provided a way for us to live guilt-free lives, and this is reason to celebrate! God knows we were not made to live with guilt, and the Scriptures declare the incredible lengths to which God has gone to allow us to experience forgiveness and freedom from this powerful emotion. As we continue our study of *Reasons to Celebrate*, we will observe truths from the Psalms regarding this aspect of being fully known and fully loved by God.

1. a. What are the positive effects of guilt? How can guilt benefit us and society in general?
  
  - b. What are some wrong responses to guilt promoted in our culture today?
  
  - c. Why do these responses to guilt only produce more problems?
- 
2. a. What negative effects can guilt have on people's lives?
  
  
  - b. How would you define the real needs of the guilty person?
- 
3. a. One reason God hates sin is that it destroys our lives. How did David describe some of the feelings produced by guilt?  
Psalm 38:4-8

Psalm 38:10-11, 14, 17

b. What was David's response? For what did he ask God?

Psalm 51:1-2

4. a. Freedom from guilt first requires *confession*, or agreeing with God that a specific action was wrong. How did David confess his sin?

Psalm 51:3-4

b. What did David acknowledge in Psalm 51:5-6?

5. Freedom from guilt also requires *repentance*, a total turning from wrong to live a godly life. How did David express his repentant spirit in Psalm 51:10-12?



6. What did David discover as he came to God with sincere confession and repentance?

Psalm 51:16-17

Psalm 32:1-2

Psalm 32:3-5

Psalm 103:3-4, 9-10

Psalm 103:11-12

7. What is God's promise to the one who comes to Him in genuine repentance?

Isaiah 1:18

Isaiah 38:17

Isaiah 55:7

8. On what basis are we cleansed from sin?  
Psalm 65:3

Isaiah 53:4-5, 10-12 (prophecy about Jesus Christ)

Ephesians 1:3, 7

Romans 5:1; Matthew 26:28

**Reference:** Note 1, *Redemption*, p. 22.

9. How does 1 John 1:9 reflect the process that brought David freedom from guilt?

10. What is also necessary in order to experience freedom from guilt?  
Matthew 5:23-24; Leviticus 6:1-5

Matthew 6:12, 14 (Matthew 18:21-35)

Colossians 3:13

11. How does Psalm 130:3-4, 7-8 sum up our reasons to celebrate God's forgiveness?

## SUMMARY

12. From what can God's forgiveness set you free? Why is the forgiveness of God a reason to celebrate?

13. What heart attitudes are important as you come to God for forgiveness?

14. Why was the cross of Christ necessary for you to be forgiven by a holy God? What does the cross prove about God's love for you?

**Reference:** Note 1, *Redemption*, p. 22.

15. What attitude does an understanding of the cross encourage you to have toward other people?

16. As we discussed in our last lesson, perfection will never be the basis on which we accept ourselves. What is always the basis of healthy self-love and forgiveness?

**Note:** *Are there areas of your life where you would like to experience God's forgiveness once and for all? It may be helpful to take a piece of paper, go before the Lord, and prayerfully list unforgiven sin. After this time of confession and repentance, write 1 John 1:9 in large letters across the sheet and destroy it, symbolizing God's total forgiveness.*

*You may want to then express forgiveness to yourself and acknowledge forgiveness of specific individuals who have hurt you. Finally, you may feel led to ask forgiveness of individuals you have wronged. As difficult as these tasks may seem, great joy and freedom is the result.*

## **LESSON 4 NOTES**

**1 False guilt.** In her book, *Falling Apart or Coming Together*, Lois Walfrid Johnson contrasts the following differences between true and false guilt.\*

|                                | <b>TRUE GUILT</b>                         | <b>FALSE GUILT</b>   |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>GUILT PRODUCER</b>          | The Holy Spirit convicts - based on truth | Satan condemns - based on lies   |
| <b>OBJECTIVE</b>               | Improvement                               | Defeat   |
| <b>SPOTLIGHT</b>               | Specific, unforgiven sin                  | Past failures and forgiven sin; general in nature  |
| <b>YOUR REACTION</b>           | Repentance; asking for forgiveness        | Remorse and helplessness; a no-win situation; not knowing how to make change; no peace                 |
| <b>GUILT PRODUCER'S ACTION</b> | Grace, forgiveness                        | Accusation   |
| <b>RESULT</b>                  | Peace; cleansing; set free; loved         | No peace; defeat; hopelessness; despair. Worthlessness; emotionally, spiritually and physically tired. |

\*Lois Walfrid Johnson, *Falling Apart or Coming Together* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), p. 66.

## Lesson 5

### ***THE LORD OUR SHEPHERD I: THE REST AND RESTORATION WE NEED***

Perhaps the most beloved psalm of all is Psalm 23. In this beautiful piece, David, who had been a shepherd before becoming a king, describes the deep fulfillment of being a "sheep" in the Lord's pasture. Through the beautiful imagery of this psalm, David declared the peace, nurture, guidance, protection and hope found in trusting and submitting to the Lord. As we move forward in time to the words of Jesus in John 10:1-8, we discover that Christ is the Good Shepherd whom David knew and loved. The incarnate Son of God showed the world the loving, trustworthy, and holy nature of God, who gives life "to the full" (John 10:10b) to those who choose to be the "sheep" of His pasture.

Sheep require more care than any other form of livestock. Because of their utterly dependent nature, the quality of care given the sheep by their shepherd determines whether they experience peace or misery. Sheep under the care of a good shepherd rest securely while those under the care of a negligent shepherd can suffer terribly. Psalm 23 reveals that the sheep rest securely not because there is an absence of danger. They find peace because they trust in the Shepherd's care and protection as they walk through danger with him at their side.

We are not unlike sheep. Although we may try to feel in control of our lives, we are all needy people. We need the care, protection, and guidance of the Good Shepherd in order to know peace amid the challenges of daily life. Psalm 23 exhibits the supernatural rest and restoration available to those who choose to yield their self-will and allow the Lord to be Master of their lives.

As we continue our study of *Reasons to Celebrate*, we will make reference to Psalm 23 for several lessons as we look at the benefits of

trusting God mentioned throughout the Book of Psalms. We will begin with the rest and restoration found in trusting the Good Shepherd.

1. Sheep are unable to rest when they are hungry, fearful, irritated by pests or upset by friction within the flock. How are we similar to sheep? What types of things make us anxious people?

2. a. How do we try to escape sources of tension apart from the Lord's help?

b. What is the result?

c. How does Psalm 55:6-8 describe our yearning to find rest amid the challenges of life?

3. How did David, whose life held many difficulties, portray the Good Shepherd's care?

Psalm 23:1-3a



4. David found rest from the weariness of life in the presence of the Good Shepherd. What did this rest involve according to the following psalms?

Psalm 3:3, 5-6; 4:8

Psalm 131:1-3

5. a. Because David trusted the Lord, he found rest for his soul. What did Jesus bid us to do in order to experience this supernatural rest amid the wearisome challenges of life?

Matthew 11:28-29

John 14:27

John 16:33

b. From whom did Jesus promise this supernatural peace would come?  
John 14:16-17

Galatians 5:22a

**Reference:** Note 1, The *Holy Spirit*, p. 35.

6. Of what does the Holy Spirit remind us when we seek the Lord:

a. When facing fear, anxiety, or worry?

Psalm 37:23-24 (Isaiah 41:10)

Psalm 94:18-19

b. When overwhelmed, lonely, or confused?

Psalm 62:5-6

Psalm 63:6-8

Psalm 73:23-26

Psalm 18:28 (Psalm 97:11)

c. From where does the peace and quiet we need come according to Psalm 46:1-3, 10-11?

7. In order to rest, sheep need to be free from hunger. What did Jesus, the Good Shepherd, promise regarding the nourishment of soul that frees us from gnawing spiritual hunger?

John 6:35

John 7:37-38

8. a. David declared that the Lord "restores my soul" (23:3a). To restore means to "mend, correct, doctor, improve." What do the following

verses suggest about how Christ, the Good Shepherd, restores our souls?  
Titus 3:5

**Reference:** Note 1, *Redemption*, p. 22.

Ezekiel 36:26-27

Philippians 2:13

b. What choices allow us to receive the restoration of soul Jesus offers?  
1 John 5:1

Psalm 86:7

Psalm 119:30, 32

Psalm 119:130 (Romans 12:2)

Psalm 143:10

9. What is God's promise to those who choose to let Him be their Shepherd?

Psalm 91:1

Psalm 91:4; Deuteronomy 33:27a

## **SUMMARY**

10. a. What in your life causes the most tension and restlessness?

b. Have you been seeking relief and rest in someone or something apart from the Lord?

c. What choices can you make to find the rest and restoration you need in Christ?

11. How can the Good Shepherd meet needs that no one or nothing else can? What does He want to give you as He restores your soul?

## Lesson 6

### ***THE LORD OUR SHEPHERD II: THE TRUSTWORTHY GUIDANCE WE NEED***

Sheep need more guidance and care than any other livestock. Left to graze pasture without direction, they will eat the same ground until it is barren and infested with parasites. As a result, the land is ruined, the sheep are thin and sickly, and the shepherd gets a bad reputation. To avoid all this, the good shepherd keeps his flock on the move, regularly guiding them into fresh pasture as he follows a carefully planned grazing strategy.<sup>1</sup>

Having been a shepherd, David knew these facts about sheep when he declared, "The Lord is my Shepherd . . . He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (Psalm 23:1,3). David saw our similarity to sheep in that our stubborn natural habits can leave us unhealthy and wreak havoc in the world around us. We need the guidance of the Good Shepherd, not just intermittently, but for direction every day of our lives. The Lord alone sees the whole picture and can be trusted to have our best interests at heart. As He guides us in good paths, others will see His care and be drawn to Him.

Sooner or later, most of us come to a place where we see that we are not wise enough to run our own lives. We realize we are lost in our quest to find fulfillment and desperately need trustworthy guidance to help us make wise choices. Here we discover that the Lord's promise to direct us is truly a reason to celebrate! As the Good Shepherd, He alone can lead us in the ways that are best for us, both now and eternally. As we continue our study on *Reasons to Celebrate*, we will make some observations about the promised and trustworthy guidance of God.

1. How are we similar to sheep in our need for direction?

2. a. Where do people turn for guidance apart from godly counsel?

b. Why is the counsel of our society often untrustworthy? What have you learned from your experience?

3. In contrast, how do these verses describe the Lord and His guidance?  
Psalm 25:9-10

**Note:** *keep the demands of His covenant* means to revere the Lord and follow His ways (cf. Deuteronomy 8:6; 10:12-13).

Psalm 18:30, 32

Psalm 92:15



4. a. As the prophet Ezekiel described selfish religious leaders of Israel, he painted a vivid picture of what happens to us if we let the world shepherd our lives. What phrases stand out to you about the care the world gives its "sheep"?  
Ezekiel 34:2-6

b. In contrast, how does Ezekiel 34:11-12, 14-16 describe the Lord's care?

**Note:** *sleek and strong* refers to bullying sheep in the flock, in this case the selfish religious leaders.

5. In John 10, Jesus identified himself as the Good Shepherd. How would you paraphrase the promises He makes those who follow Him?  
John 10:3-5

John 10:9-10

John 10:11

John 10:27-29

6. As we trust in Him, whom did Jesus promise would personally guide us in God's best way?

John 16:13

Isaiah 30:21

**Reference:** *Holy Spirit*, p. 35.

7. Psalm 23:3 says that the Lord will lead us in paths of righteousness. What does righteous living look like according to the following? List the characteristics of the lifestyle which the Lord will nurture in us.

Psalm 15

Colossians 3:12-14, 17

8. How does Psalm 1:3 describe the results of following the Lord's leadership?

9. What facets of discerning the Lord's will do the following Psalms mention?

Psalm 1:1-2

Psalm 5:3

Psalm 25:5

Psalm 119:105

10. a. In his book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Phillip Keller states: "Just as sheep will blindly, habitually, stupidly follow one another along the same little trails until they become ruts that erode into gigantic gullies, so we humans cling to the same habits that we have seen ruin

other lives." Summarize what the following Psalms suggest can hinder the Lord's leadership in our lives.

Psalm 78:8, 11, 18, 22

Psalm 138:6

Psalm 36:2

Psalm 146:3

b. What warnings about directing our lives apart from the Lord are implied in the following?

Psalm 127:1

Isaiah 28:12; 30:15

11. What attitudes and prayers found in the following psalms allow us to continually experience the Lord's guidance?

Psalm 138:8

Psalm 139:23-24

Psalm 141:3-4, 8a (Hebrews 12:2a)

Proverbs 3:5-6

12. What do these scriptures promise will result when we allow the Good Shepherd to guide our lives?

Psalm 32:8

Psalm 48:14

## **SUMMARY**

13. a. What sheep-like tendencies do you see in your own life?
- b. Why must worldly counsel be evaluated prayerfully and in light of biblical principles?

14. a. Are there areas in your life where you need special guidance today?

b. What promises about the Lord's guidance are especially meaningful to you?

15. What practices allow you to follow the leadership of Jesus Christ in your daily living?

16. Why is the guidance of the Lord a reason to celebrate?

## **LESSON 6 NOTES**

**1** Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970).





## Lesson 7

### ***THE LORD OUR SHEPHERD III: THE PROTECTION WE NEED***

Fear is an emotion that David knew well as he penned Psalm 23. His life held many fearful circumstances, perhaps the greatest of which was his flight from King Saul. Because Saul, the first king of Israel, had been unfaithful, God sent the prophet Samuel to inform Saul that He would replace the king with "a man after His own heart." Unbeknownst to Saul, that man was a young shepherd boy named David, whom Samuel was instructed to anoint secretly as Israel's next king (I Samuel 16-17). Ironically, David's love for the Lord and abilities as a musician and poet had led Saul to summon him periodically to the palace to soothe the king's depression with singing.

About that time, a nine-foot Philistine giant named Goliath challenged Israel in a representative dual. David, still in his teens, was the only one in Israel with the courage to face the enormous foe. Through faith in God, David killed the giant with a slingshot. This was only the beginning of David's God-given success as a war hero. As David led Israel in one unbelievable victory after another, Saul began to realize David was probably God's anointed king. Crazy with jealousy, Saul began a rumor that David was conspiring to overtake the throne and issued a death warrant on the young man's life. David became a fugitive, seeking to escape Saul for at least ten years.

After Saul's death, David was anointed king of Judah and later all Israel. But this was not the end of David's experiences with fear. His mistakes, especially committing adultery with Bathsheba and having her husband killed, had terrible ripple effects in his family. One of his sons, Amnon, raped his half-sister, Tamar, and her brother, Absalom, killed Amnon for his action. After this, Absalom, heir apparent to his father's throne, set up a conspiracy to kill David and take his place as king. David was

forced to flee Jerusalem and waited in anguish as civil war raged between Absalom's men and those loyal to David. During the battle, David's greatest fear came to pass: Absalom was killed. David was stricken with grief again.

David's experiences echo the fact that regardless of age or station, we all face fearful things in life. This deep emotion can paralyze us if we do not know how to find safety in the presence of the Lord. Amid the heartaches, David proclaimed, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. . . ." (Psalm 23:4). David's intimate relationship with the Lord turned his experiences toward spiritual growth and his fears into deeper love and trust in God.

In the New Testament, Jesus revealed Himself as the Lord and Good Shepherd whom David knew and loved. He instructed us regarding fear when He said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me" (John 14:1). "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). The Book of Psalms declare that we can rest in God because He is in control and will protect us amid fearful circumstances. Even in the face of enemies, David found peace as he trusted in the faithful Shepherd of his soul. As we continue our study of *Reasons to Celebrate*, we will probe more deeply into the sure protection which surrounds the "sheep of His pasture."

1. a. What causes fear in life?

b. How do people respond to fear apart from the Lord?

2. What imagery of safety did David give in Psalm 23:4-5?

**Note:** The *rod and staff* of the shepherd are used to fight off predators and rescue sheep when they fall or head in the wrong direction. The *table* is a flat in-the-open pasture. *Anointing the head with oil* keeps flies and parasites from attacking the heads and noses of the sheep.

3. a. Read Psalm 27. What did David declare in the face of fearful circumstances?

Psalm 27:1-3

Psalm 27:5

b. What did David do in fearful circumstances?

Psalm 27:7-8

Psalm 27:11

Psalm 27:13-14

4. a. Read Psalm 25. What phrases describe what David trusted God to do as he poured out His heart in prayer?

Psalm 25:15-20

5. Read Psalm 91. What phrases describe choices which allow us to receive the Lord's protection?

Psalm 91:1-2

Psalm 91:14-15

Psalm 91:9-12 (34:7)

**Reference:** Note 1, *Angels*, p. 73.

6. What truths about God mentioned in the following verses relate to His protection as the Good Shepherd?

Psalm 9:9

Psalm 34:18

Psalm 116:5-6 (Psalm 18:27)

7. a. What words or phrases describe the actions of Israel which caused the Lord to retract His protection?

Psalm 106:7, 13 (20-21)

Psalm 106:14

Psalm 106:24-25

Psalm 106:33a

Psalm 106: 35-39

Psalm 106:43

b. When God gave the people over to their own rebellious ways, they returned to the Lord. What did they discover and declare as a result?

Psalm 107:19-21

Psalm 107:28-30

c. What can be learned from Israel's experience?

8. How do the following psalms describe the love, protection, and deliverance of the Lord?

Psalm 18:16-18

Psalm 18:29

Psalm 18:36

Psalm 103:17

9. How do these Psalms suggest we should pray when we are afraid?

Psalm 22:19

Psalm 31:5, 15-16

Psalm 55:17

Psalm 59:16-17

10. What did the psalmist declare as a result of trusting in the Lord's protection?

Psalm 55:22

Psalm 68:19

Psalm 116:8

## **SUMMARY**

11. a. Is there an area(s) of your life in which you struggle with fear?



b. What can you do with this fear in order to experience peace?

c. Are certain verses from this lesson that helpful to you?

12. What must you maintain in your life in order to experience the Lord's protection?

13. Why is the Lord's protection a reason to celebrate?

## **LESSON 7 NOTES**

**1** *Angels* (Psalm 91:11-12). According to the Bible, angels surround us continually. They are created immortal beings who serve God and believers. An angel is physically powerful; for example, one angel effortlessly moved the huge stone from the tomb of Jesus, a stone three men would struggle to displace. An angel closed the mouth of the lion in Daniel 6:22. Angels are usually invisible to our eyes, but they can become visible (Genesis 16:7; Numbers 22:23; Luke 1:28). When angels do appear, they are usually glorious and stunningly beautiful causing amazement in those who witness their presence (Luke 1:11; Matthew 28:2-3; Daniel 10:6; Revelation 10:1).

Second Corinthians 11:14 states that Satan can make himself appear as an angel of God.

"Whether visible or invisible, however, God causes his angels to go before us, to be with us, and to follow after us. All of this can be fully understood only by believers who know that angelic presences are in control of the battlefield about us, so that we may stand (Isaiah 26:3) with complete confidence in the midst of the fight." Billy Graham, *Angels, God's Secret Agents*, p. 45.

## Lesson 8

### ***THE LORD OUR SHEPHERD IV: THE HOPE WE NEED***

Hope might be defined as "certainty in the present and firm expectation for the future." Everyone needs hope to thrive, because it is necessary for motivation in life. When people don't know where to find hope or put their hope in things that ultimately disappoint, despair often results, which can lead to depression and a total sense of hopelessness. Because hope is vital, psychologists and counselors work hard to restore hope to those who have become trapped in these dangerous emotions.

Because God understands our tremendous need for hope, He addresses the issue of hope from every angle in the Bible. The Psalms in particular are full of hope for every age, season, and situation in life. Psalm 23 is a good example. In the beginning of the psalm, David, guided by the Holy Spirit, wrote about the rest, guidance and protection we enjoy when the Lord is the Master of our lives. The psalm ends with a statement of hope that directs us to look forward to the future with a certainty that the Lord's care will also be there. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Only this enduring hope ultimately meets the soul's deep need for assurance of future safety and good. This is why the hope the Lord gives is a sure reason to celebrate! As we choose to trust the Lord as the Shepherd of our lives, His desire is to fill us with hope for both our immediate and eternal future with Him. As we continue our study from the Psalms, we will make some observations about this wonderful reason to celebrate.

1. a. What things do people place their hope in apart from the Lord?

b. Why do these sources of hope ultimately disappoint?

2. a. How does David describe his hope in the future as a "sheep" in the Lord's pasture?

Psalm 23:1, 6

b. What did Jesus promise as He identified Himself as the Good Shepherd?

John 10:27-28

John 11:25-26

3. a. What did the resurrection of Jesus Christ give us according to the following verses?

1 Peter 1:3 (1 Corinthians 15:20-22)

**Reference:** Note 1, *Redemption*, p. 22.

b. How do these psalms speak of the eternal salvation of the Good Shepherd?

Psalm 49:7-9, 15

Psalm 86:13 (23:6b)

4. The lasting hope God gives can only be found through trusting Him and His Word. A person must have faith or trust in God through Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Romans 3:22) to experience lasting hope. For this reason, *trust* (or *faith*) and *hope* are used synonymously in the Scriptures. Note how the words *trust* and *hope* can be substituted for one another in the following verses.

Psalm 32:10b

Psalm 125:1

Isaiah 26:3-4

5. a. Read Psalm 34. Record the words or phrases which describe the rewards of trusting in the Lord.

Psalm 34:4-7

**Note:** *Fear of the Lord* refers to reverent trust based on a relationship of love.

**Reference:** Note 1, *angels*, p. 73.

Psalm 34:8

Psalm 34:22

b. What phrases in Psalm 34 describe the choices that allow us to experience the Lord's hope?

What does Psalm 130:5 and 63:8 add to this?

6. a. What are some reasons people lose hope in life?

b. Discouragement and despair can lead to depression (total hopelessness) over life's problems. What did the psalmist say to himself when he faced discouragement and despair?

Psalm 42:5

Psalm 62:5-6

Psalm 33:20-21 (27:13-14)

Psalm 31:22-24

7. Sometimes we are afraid to go to other believers for help when we face depression, but the Scriptures encourage us to reach out for help and to give help to others when they are depressed. How do the following verses support this principle?

Job 2:11-13 (Romans 12:15)

Galatians 6:2 (Luke 6:31; John 15:12)

Romans 15:1-2

**Note:** Depression can be caused by unconfessed sin in our lives regarding a specific wrong(s), and confession to God with a fellow believer or minister may be helpful (cf. James 5:16). It is important, however, to seek the help of a person who is humble (knows their own weaknesses) and compassionate, can keep a confidence and is true to God's word. Confession of sin can, however, be altogether private (1John 1:9; note, p. 33).

8. David was a shepherd when he wrote Psalm 23, so he knew that sheep are sometimes exposed to terrible life-threatening storms. We,



too, can be jolted by the storms of life. But Psalm 23 declares that the Lord's goodness and mercy will be with us in these times. According to the following verses, why can we have fearless hope in spite of the unknown storms to come?

Psalm 18:32-33

Romans 8:28

Romans 8:31-32 (35-37)

Romans 8:38-39

Jeremiah 29:11

9. What does the Lord want us to experience in every season of our lives as we put our hope in Him?

Romans 15:13

## **SUMMARY**

10. How is the hope the Lord gives you different from the hope of the world?

11. Is there an area of your life where you want to be filled with the Lord's hope? What can you do to experience this hope?

12. What is the Lord's promise to you regarding the unknown future?

## Lesson 9

### ***HONESTY WITH GOD IN TIMES OF SUFFERING***

One cannot read the Psalms without being struck by the absolute candor with God of its writers, especially in times of suffering. The Psalms are filled with examples of complete honesty about negative feelings.

"Where are you, God?" "How long will you wait?" "Are you going to let me die?" "Come quick and help me!" "I hate my enemies, Lord. Crush them!"

Because the Psalms are God's inspired Word, we can safely assume from all this that God wants us to come to Him in total honesty about every issue of life. The 17th century Archbishop Francois Fenelon described such intimacy with God when he wrote:

*Tell God all that is in your heart, as one unloads one's heart, its pleasures and its pains, to a dear friend. Tell Him your troubles, that He may comfort you; tell Him your joys, that He may sober them; tell Him your longings, that He may purify them; tell Him your dislikes, that He may help you to conquer them; talk to Him about your temptations, that He may shield you from them; show Him the wounds of your heart, that He may heal them; lay bare your indifference to good, your depraved tastes for evil, your instability. Tell Him how self-love makes you unjust to others, how vanity tempts you to be insincere, how pride disguises you to yourself and to others.*

*If you thus pour out all your weaknesses, needs, troubles, there will be no lack of what to say. You will never exhaust the subject. It is continually being renewed. People who have no secrets from each other never want for subjects of conversation. They do not weigh their words, for there is nothing to be held back; neither do they seek for something to say. They talk out of the abundance of the heart, without*

*consideration they say just what they think. Blessed are they who attain to such familiar, unreserved intercourse with God.*

That we can be open and honest with a gracious heavenly Father who knows everything about us and loves us unconditionally is truly a reason to celebrate. All of us, like the psalmists, find ourselves overwhelmed by sufferings of various kinds in our lives. At these times more than any other, we need to be free to pour out our hearts to the Lord.

But certain things must be true in order to fully benefit from honesty with God. First, our focus in life must be God-centered, rather than self-centered. If we are centered only on ourselves, our selfishness alone will create suffering in our lives. Also, our trust in God will be shallow and our love for God conditioned on His performing to meet our wishes. Our mindset will become one which forgets what God has given and focuses on what He has failed to give. In short, the self-centered person unwittingly places himself in God's place and sees God as his servant. For God to do the bidding of such a person would only enable him to continue on a destructive path. Therefore, God distances Himself from the complaints of the proud and self-centered (Psalm 138:6).

Second, we must be careful not to blame God for suffering caused by the wrong choices of other people. Most, if not all, of the suffering complained about in the Psalms can be traced to someone's sin. A good example was David, who faced the consequences of his sin with Bathsheba (Psalm 38), or Saul who was insanely jealous toward David (see commentary, p. 65). Other psalms about suffering reference Israel's oppression under her enemies which resulted from her rebellion against God.<sup>1</sup> The psalmists understood this as they pleaded with God for merciful deliverance from oppression.

God is sovereign, and therefore it stands that He permits freedom of choice and thereby evil in His creation. But while God allows suffering, clearly He does not cause evil (cf. James 1:3; Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm

145:17; Job 34:10; Habakkuk 1:13). Psalm 145:17 states, "The Lord is righteous in all His ways and loving toward all He has made." It is important, therefore, to come to God with clarity about who is responsible for our pain: a fallen world, our own wrong choices, or the wrong choices of others.

Finally, when we voice our complaints to the Lord, we must be ready to leave people and outcomes in God's hands and let God be God. Throughout the Scriptures, God bids us to come to Him with the adoration and candor of a much-loved child who also realizes his humble place. We do not see all that God sees and are infinitely below Him in understanding (Isaiah 55:8-9). When we come to Him with childlike faith, however, we are assured that His infinite love, wisdom and power will work on our behalf.

Warren Wiersbe states in his book *Why Us?* that what we need most in times of suffering is not an explanation of why, but rather a revelation of God's goodness and faithfulness to us. As we cling to Him during times of suffering, He draws near and helps us to make suffering work *for* us rather than *against* us.

God graciously invites us to come to Him in total honesty as to a loving Friend who bids us to "cast our cares on Him" as He "daily bears our burdens" (Psalm 68:19). As we look to Him in faith, He promises to carry us through the sufferings of life, and this is reason to celebrate. Let's look at these wonderful principles more closely as we continue our study in the Psalms.

1. a. What are typical responses to times of suffering in our lives?

b. Why is it important to be honest with the Lord in times of suffering?

c. Why do people sometimes find it difficult to be honest with God about the things they suffer?

2. a. How is honesty with God described in the following psalms?

Psalm 61:2

Psalm 88:9, 13

Psalm 118:5

b. What situations caused the psalmists to pour out their hearts to God?

Psalm 10:2-12

Psalm 13:2

Psalm 17:8-14

Psalm 22:11-19

Psalm 35:11-16

Psalm 60:1-3

**Reference:** Note 1, *Israel's rebellion*, p. 95.

3. Three elements usually existed in psalms of complaint. The writer voiced (1) the issue at hand, (2) what he wanted the Lord to do, and (3) declarations of the Lord's care and faithfulness.

a. Read Psalm 55. Summarize statements or record *phrases* from the following verses which fall under each category.

(1) Issue (55:2b-8, 10, 12-14, 20-21)

(2) Prayer (55:1-2a, 9)

(3) Praise (55:16-19, 22-23)

b. Read Psalm 57, then summarize the verses under the following divisions.

(1) Issue (57:4, 6)

(2) Prayer (57:1)

(3) Praise (57:2-3, 7-11)



c. What does this pattern in the psalms teach us about honesty with the Lord in times of suffering?

**Note:** Other psalms about suffering included pain from sin and woundedness (Psalm 38, 55), bitter strife with evil enemies (Psalm 10, 17, 22, 35, 43, 56 58, 59, 142, 143), hurt from close friends and depression (Psalm 42, 55, 109).

4. How is honesty with God and its greatest reward simply described in: Philippians 4:6-7

Psalm 55:22

5. a. Charles Spurgeon said that the promises of God never shine so brightly as in the furnace of affliction. Although we may feel God is distant and uninvolved during our times of suffering, what do the Scriptures promise?

Psalm 34:18

Psalm 46:1

Psalm 68:19

Deuteronomy 31:6

b. What is God able to do as we trust Him in times of suffering?

Isaiah 40:31

Isaiah 41:10

Isaiah 42:16

Isaiah 43:1b-2

6. When we know that a specific sin in our lives caused our suffering, what must we do as we come to God for help?

Psalm 32:5

Psalm 66:18-20

**Note:** In times of suffering, it is easy to be overcome by false guilt. For help, review the chart defining true and false guilt on page 46.

7. a. What phrase did Paul use to describe the suffering he endured?

2 Corinthians 12:7

**Reference:** Note 1, *Satan*, p. 95.

b. What did the Lord reveal to Paul about times of suffering?

2 Corinthians 12:8-9

8. a. What do the following verses promise can come from times of suffering if we determine to trust God and make the trial work *for us*?

Romans 5:3-5

James 1:2-4

1 Peter 1:6-7

**Note:** Our faith is most pure when we can look to God and trust Him and His Word apart from anything He gives or doesn't give. This is especially true when we don't understand what He is doing. This was the theme of the Book of Job.

b. How is this truth described by Job, a man who endured incredible suffering during the testing of his faith?

Job 23:10

9. As we follow the example set in the psalms of honesty during times of suffering, what will we choose?

Psalms 25:15

Psalms 46:2-3 (7)

Psalm 62:8

Psalm 62:5-6

## **SUMMARY**

10. What have you observed from this lesson about honesty with God in times of suffering?

11. a. What can keep you from experiencing the nearness and help of God in times of suffering?

b. What does the Lord promise to do for you as you come to Him in these times?

12. Suffering is a part of each of our lives here on earth. How can you get the suffering you face to work for rather than against you?

*Footprints in the Sand*  
by Margaret Powers

One night I had a dream--  
I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord and  
    Across the sky flashed scenes from my life.  
For each scene I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,  
    One belonged to me and the other to the Lord.  
When the last scene of my life flashed before us,  
    I looked back at the footprints in the sand.  
I noticed, that many times along the path of my life,  
    There was only one set of footprints.  
I also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times  
    in my life.  
This really bothered me and I questioned the Lord about it.  
    "Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you,  
    You would walk with me all the way,  
But I have noticed that during the most  
    troublesome times in my life  
There is only one set of footprints.  
    I don't understand why in times when I  
    needed you most, you should leave me."  
The Lord replied, "My precious, precious child, I love you and I  
    would never, never leave you during your times of trial and  
    suffering.  
When you saw only one set of footprints,  
    It was then that I carried you."

**Recommended Reading:** Warren W. Wiersbe, *Why Us? When Bad Things Happen to God's People*, (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1984).

## LESSON 9 NOTES

**1** *Israel's rebellion.* The psalmists pleaded with God for deliverance from oppressive foes. These pleas need to be understood in the context of Israel's history. In Psalm 106, we can see the cycle which Israel repeated again and again. When they enjoyed the blessings of the Lord, they began to take His protection and care for granted and to disregard His guidelines for healthy living. They proceeded to absorb the heathen cultures around them until they reached horrific levels of depravity, sacrificing their children to pagan idols. After many warnings through the prophets (Psalm 106:35-39; Isaiah 30:15-22), God would withdraw His grace and allow them to experience the results of their sin (Psalm 106:43). It was in these times of heartache that many of the psalms of complaint were written, pleading with God to return His protection and grace to Israel. The psalmists at these times understood that the suffering they were experiencing was the result of their sin, not of unfaithfulness on God's part. In love and faithfulness to His covenant with Israel (cf. Deuteronomy 8:11-13, 18-20), He withdrew His protection to stop Israel's terrible sins from destroying more lives and maligning God's name before the world. The disrespect and disregard for God and His repeated pleas and warnings to turn from evil and return to Him brought on the hardship they experienced.

**2** *Satan, demons.* While the whole idea of Satan and evil adversaries called demons is incredible to some, it is important to understand what the Bible has to say about them.

The Bible refers to Satan as an angelic being who led a heavenly revolt against God. Consequently, God cast him out of heaven with his rebelling host of angels (2 Peter 2:4; Revelation 12:7-9). Under Satan's

leadership, these angelic beings became known as demons, and are very organized in their schemes and attacks on human beings (Ephesians 6:12). Satan and his forces work to get people to worship Satan (Luke 4:7) and to prevent individuals from turning to God (Luke 4:8). Satan's defeat is promised in Genesis 3:15 and was completed at the cross of Christ (Colossians 2:15). He is still a force to be reckoned with until Christ returns to judge the earth (Matthew 16:27). James 4:7 instructs believers to resist the devil (or demonic forces) by continually willing God's leadership in their lives and standing firm in faith, especially in times of trial (1 Peter 5:8-9).



## Lesson 10

### *SEEING GOD AS HE REALLY IS*

History has proven that what a society believes about God has a profound impact on the direction that society takes toward good or evil. In the same way, what we believe as individuals about God has a profound impact on our character and overall life experience. In his book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A. W. Tozer states: "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. For this reason...the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God."

Even though a true perception of God is so important, too few possess it. Psychologists have discovered that our images of God are derived largely in our primary years (ages 0-6) from the characteristics of significant authority figures, such as parents. Our beliefs about God can also be influenced by teachers at school, church leaders, or by society in general. Consequently, ill treatment or inaccurate teaching from parents, teachers, or religious leaders can combine with societal trends, such as denying the existence of any absolute truth, to create a very warped perception of God in our minds. As a result, we may view God as austere and harsh, passive and weak, human and temperamental, unknowable, or simply non-existent.

But an understanding of God is available to anyone who desires to know Him. God has revealed Himself to us through the wonders of creation, through the Scriptures, and most amazingly through His Son, Jesus Christ, who "became flesh and lived for a while among us" (John 1:14).

The redemption<sup>2</sup> story in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ declares the infinite and humanly incomprehensible love of God toward us, His creatures.

We can undo distorted thinking of the past and grow in a true knowledge of God, and that is a reason to celebrate. As we grow in an understanding of His greatness and goodness, we will discover God to be "easy to live with"<sup>3</sup> and most worthy of our praise. In our last two lessons on *Reasons to Celebrate*, we will summarize the true character of God revealed in the Psalms as we celebrate the gift of seeing God as He really is.

1. a. What are some reasons people do not possess a correct understanding of God?

b. What can be the results of not perceiving God accurately?

c. What does Romans 1:25, 28-32 suggest about the society that does not respond to God's revelation of Himself?

2. According to these Scriptures, how does God reveal Himself to us?  
Romans 1:20 (Psalm 19:1)

Psalm 119:130

Hebrews 1:1-3a

John 1:14

John 14:21, 23

3. a. What do these psalms state about the **sovereignty and majesty** of the Lord?

Psalm 47:2

Psalm 96:6-7

Psalm 113:4-6 (Psalm 89:5-8, 11-14)

Psalm 145:13a

b. His **unchanging and eternal** nature?  
Numbers 23:19

Psalm 102:27

Psalm 135:13

Hebrews 13:8

4. a. How do these psalms describe the Lord as the **creator of the universe?**

Psalm 33:6-9

Psalm 104:24 (Psalm 104:5-23, 25-26)

Psalm 146:6

Psalm 147:4

b. As the **sustainer of all creation?**

Psalm 145:15-16

Psalm 147:8-9 (65:9-13)

5. a. What do the Scriptures declare about God's **power and wisdom**?

1 Chronicles 29:11-12

Luke 1:37

Job 42:2

Romans 11:33

b. About God's **love and compassion**?

Psalm 145:8-9

6. What was the psalmists' response to the true revelation of God?

Psalm 66:1-4

## SUMMARY

7. a. Why is it important that you have an accurate perception of God?

b. What can hinder you from seeing God as He really is?

**Note:** If you can identify specific reasons your image of God or Jesus Christ has been damaged, perhaps you would like to take a moment to ask God to remove these obstacles to seeing Him as He really is.

c. What sources of God's revelation of Himself can you meditate upon in order to receive and maintain a true perception of God?

8. How would you summarize the truths about God you have studied in this lesson?

## **LESSON 10 NOTES**

**1** A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York, Evanston, London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1961), pp. 9-13.

**2 Reference:** Note 1, *Redemption*, p. 22.

**3 Reference:** "God is Easy to Live With" on pp. 12-13.



## Lesson 11

### ***CELEBRATE THE LORD!***

Sociology and history have proven human beings need to worship. Every culture of history has developed some form of religious worship. In societies all over the world today, there are countless numbers of religious expressions and beliefs. The tendency toward worship may also be seen in people's awe and exaltation of famous athletes, musicians, public speakers, politicians, or the wealthy. More rarely, some people in history have sought to amass worship for themselves. The Scriptures confirm that people who reject the worship of God will worship and serve "created things rather than the Creator" (Rom 1:25).

Our need to worship, however, is only truly fulfilled by the spontaneous praise that results when we discover the Lord. The Psalms record the natural response of Israel to God's revelation of His goodness and greatness to them. Sometimes their praise manifested itself in outward celebration as they praised God with instruments, song, dance, shouting and lifted hands! At other times, their praise was a quiet celebration of the heart, a bowing before God as they pondered His wonderful character. In either case, their worship was a spontaneous response to God's revelation of Himself to them. They exhibited the fact that seeing God as He truly is results in deep joy and celebration of soul.

*Reasons to Celebrate* has been a study about God's revelation of Himself to us. The biblical writings claim divine origin (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21), claims that have been validated by historical, literary, and archeological tests.<sup>1</sup> For these reasons, we can be assured we have been studying God's revelation about Himself, not what man imagines Him to be.

We have observed that the Lord is present with us night and day, so that we are never alone in the battles of life. He has given us the Bible as a

trustworthy guidebook for life upon which we can stand securely. We have seen how the Lord's unconditional love and acceptance gives us a foundation for loving ourselves, and how the Lord's compassion and gracious forgiveness through Christ frees us from guilt and allows us continuous access to God through prayer.

We have observed how the Lord's care for us is like that of a good shepherd. He diligently provides for our needs for rest and restoration, guidance, protection, and hope. We have seen how the Lord encourages our honesty with Him, and how He is faithful to carry us through and redeem times of suffering. Finally, we looked at the majesty and sovereignty of God as He sustains the universe and earth, without which we could not thrive.

As we embrace the truth God has given us about Himself, setting aside misconceptions that threaten to control our thinking and negate our faith, we will genuinely praising God and experience the supernatural peace, hope, and fulfillment true worship brings. In his book, *The Pursuit of God*, A. W. Tozer defines faith as "the gaze of a soul upon a saving God." The worship that fulfills our hearts could also be defined in this way. It is the choice to take our eyes off ourselves, set our gaze upon the goodness and greatness of God, and trust Him as the gracious Lord of our lives. We will conclude our study of the Psalms with a final look at the character of the One who alone is worthy of our praise and worship.

1. a. How has the human need to worship been misdirected throughout history?

b. What produced genuine praise in the lives of the psalmists? What produces genuine praise in our lives?

2. Praise has been simply defined as *stating something true about God*. What do the following psalms proclaim about God's **love and forgiveness**?

Psalm 33:5b

Psalm 103:8, 17

Psalm 103:9-12

3. a. What do these Psalms reveal about the Lord's **gentleness, generosity and graciousness**?

Psalm 18:35-36 (Isaiah 40:11)

Psalm 84:11 (Romans 8:32)

Psalm 145:15-16

b. His **faithfulness?**

Psalm 48:14 (Isaiah 46:4)

Psalm 108:4

Psalm 117:2b

c. His **goodness?**

Psalm 119:68a

Psalm 31:19

4. a. What do these psalms proclaim about God's **righteousness, justice, and fairness?**

Psalm 98:9b

Psalm 99:4

Psalm 119:137-138

Psalm 145:17

b. His **holiness?**

Psalm 99:3, 5, 9

**Note:** *Holiness* includes moral excellence, perfect righteousness, purity, and rectitude. It is being set apart from sin.

5. a. God's crowning revelation of Himself was the incarnation of His Son, Jesus Christ. What did Jesus say about this revelation of God?  
John 14:9b-10

**Reference:** Note 2, *The Trinity*, p. 113.

b. What is the most important aspect of God's character exhibited in the life, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ?  
Romans 5:8 (John 3:16)

John 10:11 (Jesus speaking)

**Reference:** Note 1, *Redemption*, p. 22.

6. What results of knowing and loving God are found in the following verses?  
Psalm 16:11 (Isaiah 12:3)

Psalm 27:4

Psalm 34:5

Psalm 89:15-16

2 Corinthians 3:18

2 Peter 1:3-4

7. Psalm 100 summarizes the praise theme of the Psalms. What does this psalm instruct us to do and why?

8. Whom do the following psalms exhort to praise the Lord?

Psalm 148

Psalm 150:6

## SUMMARY

9. How has this study from the Psalms affected your relationship with God?

10. What unchanging reasons to celebrate have you discovered or been reminded about through this study?

11. How has God's revelation of Himself to you affected your life? Perhaps you would like to take a moment to thank the Lord for revealing Himself to you.

## LESSON 11 NOTES

**1** Suggested reading regarding the reliability of the Scriptures: *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, F. F. Bruce; *Objections Answered*, R. C. Sproul; *Inerrancy Answered*, Norman Geisler; *God's Inerrant Word*, John Warwick Montgomery.



**2** *Trinity* (God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit). While "Trinity" as a word is not in the Bible, Christian doctrine historically has used this term to describe God as He has revealed Himself. The Bible explains that God is one God in three equal persons: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Certain passages in the Old Testament hint of a plurality in God (Genesis 1:26, 3:22, 11:7; Isaiah 6:8).

The Old Testament also speaks of someone coming from God who is God (i.e., Christ, Isaiah 7:14, 9:6).

The New Testament clearly portrays Jesus Christ as God (John 1:1; Philippians 2:6; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:8) and the Holy Spirit as God (Luke 1:35; Acts 5:3-4; Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14). All three persons of the Trinity share the divine characteristics of holiness, power, goodness, omniscience, omnipotence, etc. While they all may be involved in an activity such as teaching, for instance, each is associated with certain specific works. The Father is associated with designing creation, the Son with the work of creation and redemption, and the Holy Spirit with the work of sanctifying believers. In many New Testament passages, mention of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit occurs in the same sentence (Jude 20-21; Ephesians 4:4-6, 1 John 4:2; 1 Peter 1:2; Titus 3:4-6; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Galatians 4:4-6; Romans 5:5-6; John 15:26).

# **REASONS TO CELEBRATE STUDIES FROM THE BOOK OF PSALMS**

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