

From the *Different Starts Today* Series

Trusting God for a Better Tomorrow

A Study of Psalms

Book 1 - Psalms 1-41

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for a
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Dedication

I dedicate this study to “She She” a.k.a. Sheila Magnum.
She pushed me to the door and held it open.

*Sheila~ you helped me see when I could not and when I would not.
You are the sweetness and joy of Heaven right here on earth.
My life is richer because you are a part of it.
Thanks for holding the pom poms and cheering me on thus far.
I love you dearly!*

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To: My Online Class on Walking With Women Through the Word

You have encouraged me beyond words through our years together. It has been a joy to watch you grow in Christ and fall in love with His Word. You have changed my life!!! I can't wait until we all meet in Heaven!

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I have loved your "reports from the field." Thank you for being the eyes and ears to the study. The feedback you and your class have given helped me keep going. You are a treasured friend! And Bob, well, I love having boys in class!

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What can I say? Thank you is not enough!!! You exceeded my expectations with the study's editing and feedback. I am grateful for your excellence!!! Your depth and knowledge of the Word gave me insights that made me really think. I love you my sweet and beautiful Canadian friend. Only God could have crossed countries to join our hearts in the love for His Word.

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Samantha, you make my words say what I meant for them to say in the first place. Thank you for sharing your immense talent for editing to make *Trusting God for a Better Tomorrow* sound *better* and read easier. I love working on the other side of the carpeted cubicle from you in the P31 office. I love Christmas music in July!

To My P31 Team Members

We share quite a journey, don't we? I love doing ministry with you girls and sharing in what God does through you. He is doing more than we could ever ask or imagine! Thanks for loving me and encouraging my love for Bible study.

To My P31 Office Family:

Life is sweeter with you in my corner. MT—My *Name that Tune* friend, I celebrate what God is doing through you. Your smile makes walking through the door a pleasure. Barb—Your quiet and sometimes direct wisdom is exactly what I need in my life. My wallet is full of stamps and the concession stand at the movie theater gets my money now. Thank you for loving me enough! LC—Thanks for sharing your carpet-bag of treasures with me. I can't wait to sit under the question mark again with you at She Speaks. You are one of the most amazing women I know! Teri—You have caught many of my tears during our times of community. You and Jim are blessings to the Popes and your friendship is a beautiful thing in my life. Sheila— Read the dedication page-enough said. Vicki— thanks for coming in with bogo treats for our P31 family. You give unselfishly, and so many are blessed!

And to my precious friend—LeLe---God gave us strict instructions to care for and love you and Nick, I never expected to be the one blessed. You have taught me to serve and sacrifice for others even when I did not think I had anything to offer. I have loved watching God restore His best in your life. I am thrilled about all He has in store for you. Open your hands and your heart; He has so much more to give.

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I said it before and I will say it again and again: Thank you for being a woman who said yes to God. Your yes changed my life!

To Kristi~ My Sister in Christ

Thank you for pointing me to Jesus and His precious Word. I have always wanted to love it like you do. You mean more to me than you could ever possibly imagine. God brought us together through the study of His ancient words and now, it holds us together. I will forever think of you when I see a rainbow because I know how much you love them and when I wake to a low fog over the lake.

To: Christie the Bestest BFF

You are the “st end” I am the “be fri”. You make my birds fly and my bacon fry. In our forty-four years of friendship you have never wavered in your love for and belief in me. It is beyond my understanding why as a preschooler you chose me under the Magnolia Tree, but I am eternally thankful you did. “Where would I be without my Christie?” I’d be in a mess. If I’ve gotta deal with the bugs in the woods, I am thankful you are in the woods with me.

“God gave me you for the ups and downs. God gave me you for the days of doubt for when I think I’ve lost my way. There are no words here left to say, it’s true God gave me you” -Blake Shelton

To My Daddy and Momma:

Even at 45 you are still “Daddy” ---the greatest man I know. Thanks for showing me by example the importance of reading God’s Word every day. Momma—there is not enough paper in the world to hold all the words I could say about you. Our morning chats have literally changed the direction of my day. You have taught me that making the Lord our everything is how we make it through days we don’t think we can make it through.

To My family, Scott, Blaire, and my G-Man

I am up late at night and up early in the morning. There is a computer and Bible on my lap most of the day. This Bible Study and the ones to follow are as much yours as they are mine. You have to put up with a lot and sometimes miss things so I can be where God has called me to be and do what He has called me to do. I know you don’t always understand it all, but understand this: I love you more than life. It is the deepest desire of my heart that you fuel your life with the power of God’s Word---it is the secret to a full, abundant, and complete life---it makes this life Heaven on Earth.

Foreword

On That Day

My life changed *that day*—the day I opened the old tattered green Bible. The change was not instantaneous, but the seed of change was planted in my heart. I once heard Beth Moore say, “God does not send forth His Word to hear Himself speak, but to accomplish something.” And that is just what He did on *that day* in my life.

My life prior to *that day* was filled with all things church. Dr. Raymond Sanderson took my hand as I accepted Jesus as my Savior at the tender age of seven. The years that followed were full of mistakes erased by time, and sin covered by grace.

After marrying the man of my dreams, topped off with blue eyes and a red sports car (I said I was saved, not noble) my happily-ever-after began. My happy included a cute Cape Cod on Logan Street, a position teaching fourth grade at the local elementary school, and new friends in a new church. Life was not only good, it was great, until we tried to add a baby to our bliss.

Two years of heartache and disappointment, basal body thermometers, Clomid injections, and frequent visits to the infertility specialist eventually resulted in the birth of our daughter. Life was once again great and we knew that with God, all things are possible.

After the arrival of our bundle of joy, my husband and I moved back to our hometown. Grandparents have a strong draw. In God’s sovereignty and greatness, He made a way for us to call the perfect house on a cul-de-sac our own. You know the one, where neighbors mingle together outside and the streets are full of children at play. Life was great for a while. And then it got hard.

Our wonderful new home turned into a house my husband described as, “A place I don’t want to come home to.” He was gone a lot. I was alone, a lot. The time alone made me see clearly that something was missing. I had no idea what it was or where to find it. All of a sudden I was aware of the emptiness of my salvation. At a young age God saved my soul, but I had never surrendered it. A soul that is saved but not surrendered is void of the fullness of Christ. I was living in the void.

I Started Here

God heard the cries from my empty, broken, and unfulfilled heart. He met me in the chair *that day* as I opened the tattered green Bible to Psalm 1. He was there when I read:

“Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on His law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.” (vs 1-3)

On *that day*, God tenderly let me see what I was missing: I had failed to include Him in my happily-ever-after. My tree (life) was planted in places far from the streams of His

living water. Planting myself far from the Stream had left me thirsty. The unfertile soil and lack of hydration was causing me to wither away.

My eyes raced over and over the words as desperately as a parched runner pants for water. Through the repetition, God revealed how to find what I was missing: meditate on His Word. It had never occurred to me that His law could be delightful or that meditating on it day and night was possible. “*How does one meditate on Your Word day and night and still get things done, Lord?*” I asked. In a faint whisper I heard, “Start here.”

On *that day* I started here, in Psalms. Even though I had been all about church and church things, I had no idea how to study, understand, or truly apply God’s Word to my life much less meditate on it day and night. So I started here.

Each morning for the next 150 days I read a Psalm a day. Wait a minute, let me back up. I spent more than one day reading Psalm 119. Have you seen Psalm 119? Its 176 verses ... a bit intimidating for this babe in the Word.

New Hope

With each sunrise I waited with new hope. Waited with hope that the day would somehow be different than the day before. The Psalms helped my life grow roots in the fertile soil of God’s Word. The Psalms made it possible to wait on the transformation I needed, and God wanted, for my life.

The Hebrew word most often used to translate the word *wait* is the *qavah* (kaw-vaw'). It means to bind together like a twisted rope, look patiently, hope, expect, and look eagerly. God peppered this powerful word throughout Psalms. He teaches that when viewed through the perspective of hope, waiting is a good thing.

Sitting with the Lord in the quiet and darkness of the dawn taught me to wait with hope. The Psalms helped me bind my heart like a twisted rope to the heart of God and His Word. I was able to open my eyes and look with patient expectation to see how God was working in my life. They challenged me, teaching me words and concepts to meditate upon day and night. These words and concepts transformed my responses to troubles I faced, empowering me to bear fruit rather than wither away.

Different Starts Today

Thank you for walking with me through God’s Word one Psalm at a time. Being part of God’s work in your life is a great honor and one I take seriously. Your journey is important to me. You have been prayed for and will be blessed through your commitment to strengthen your faith by studying God’s unfathomable Word.

The *Trusting God for a Better Tomorrow* Series starts with the study of Book 1 of Psalms. We will open and unpack the life applications found in Psalm 1-41. Your study can be enhanced by the 41 video teachings available with this study.

Different started for me on *that day*. Your *that day* can be today, sweet sister. Yes, indeed, different starts today because you can trust Him for a better tomorrow.

How to Use This Study

Trusting God for a Better Tomorrow is perfect to be used as an individual or group study.

You will need a ½ inch binder to house your copy of the study. View Finders are nice so you can display the book's beautiful cover. You may want to include loose leaf notebook paper or purchase a small spiral notebook for additional notes. God is always speaking and it is important have paper to write down everything He says.

The teaching in *Trusting God for a Better Tomorrow* is from the NIV1984 translation of God's Word. Your personal study will be enhanced by keeping other translations of the Bible close by. I am not suggesting you purchase more Bibles. I am inviting you to use the Bibles you have around the house or the free online sources such as www.biblegateway.com and www.studylight.org. You will be amazed to see how enriched your Bible study will be.

The Specifics

Read

Friend, this may sound silly but read the Psalm. Read it all. Read it silently. Read it aloud. The Word has power. It is easy to skim familiar text but skimming will prevent new truths from taking root in your heart. Hebrews 4:12 says the Word of is alive and active. Translation: it *never* gets old. Given the opportunity, God's Word will *always* produce fruit.

Video Teaching

Each Psalm has a 12-15 minute video teaching available. The videos are not sold individually. You may purchase them in a combo set with your copy of the study. The video teaching will greatly enhance your study of each Psalm, but are not necessary to complete the study.

If you purchase the videos, please remember your member password. You will be the only one who knows it.

Journal

As mentioned previously, include loose leaf notebook paper or a spiral notebook with your copy of *Trusting God for a Better Tomorrow*. In addition to the study questions, you will have the opportunity to personalize what God is teaching you by responding to the following:

The Message (when used with video curriculum)

Record new concepts taught in the video teaching. Meditate on them.

Truth

Record a new truth God taught you in the Psalm.

Wonder About

Record a question about the Psalm. Something you *wonder about*. If possible, find the answer.

Thankful

Record one thing for which you are thankful.

Faith Stretching/Strengthening

Record how you feel God is stretching or strengthening your faith through the Psalm.

Features

Each Psalm includes background and historical information in order for the reader to figuratively join the Psalmist's emotions and struggles. I share openly and honestly in my teaching how the Psalms have transformed and are still transforming my life. My goal is to equip and encourage you to apply what you are learning. The questions and Biblical passages will have you digging through the pages of the Bible, running from Genesis to Revelation. What a gift it is to bear witness to your own life transformation!

Through learning the Hebrew and Greek meanings of key words in each Psalm, you will discover the relevancy and power of God's Word in your life. You see how something written so long ago can change your life today. Studying God's Word in this way makes it easy to see how each tomorrow can be different.

Think About Its are phrases and questions peppered throughout the study. The reader can make journal responses or just pray and ponder.

At the conclusion of each lesson, the reader is given the opportunity to write how she believes the Lord wants her to personally respond to the lesson. God always calls us to action when He teaches.

Thank you for joining me in *Trusting God for a Better Tomorrow*. We pray, asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better (Ephesians 1:17) and that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:16-19).

“Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” (Ephesians 3:20)

Speak, oh Lord, Your children are listening.

Introduction

The Five Books

The 150 Psalms are divided into 5 separate books. Each Book of Psalms is associated with one of the first five books of the Bible, also referred to the Pentateuch. The Pentateuch introduces creation, the rise and fall of man, the law, and overall character of God.

This is the association of the Pentateuch and Psalms:

Genesis:	Psalms 1-41	Regarding Man
Exodus:	Psalms 42-72	Regarding Israel as a Nation
Leviticus	Psalms 73-89	Regarding the Sanctuary
Numbers	Psalms 90-106	Regarding Israel and Other Nations of the Earth
Deuteronomy	Psalms 107-150	Regarding God and His Word ¹

The series *Trusting God for a Better Tomorrow* takes an in-depth look at all 150 Psalms. This is the study of Book 1.

Book 1

David composed 37 of the 41 Psalms in Book 1. You will hear David's voice in Psalm 1, 2, 10, and 33 even though they are not credited to him. Since David is given credit for the majority of the psalms we will study, we should get to know him a little better.

As we begin our study it would be extremely beneficial to read David's story. It begins in 1 Samuel 16. David was working as he did every day, tending to his father's sheep. God sent Samuel to anoint one of Jesse's eight sons as king of Israel. The son who Samuel anointed was David.

When God was looking for a man to replace Saul as king of Israel, He did not choose a man with the most political involvement, full of military experience and accomplishments, or a well-respected public figure. No, God had only one requirement for the man who would govern His beloved people. God said,

"You have done a foolish thing," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command." (1 Samuel 13:13-14 NIV ~Emphasis Mine)

¹ <http://harvep.tripod.com/Psalms.html>

God did not choose David because he had a *sinless* heart. He chose David because he had a *seeking* heart. David sought with all his heart to:

- Love God
- Uphold His law
- Worship Him as the one and only God
- Honor Him as King

David lived in a sinful world seeking God with all his heart, yet on numerous occasions he fell short. God did not hold David's sins against him, but upheld him for his efforts to live a righteous, God-focused life.

We live in a sinful world and on occasion fall short of how God wants us to live. God does not count sins against those who seek forgiveness (Psalm 32:1-2) and upholds those who seek righteousness. (Psalm 37:17) The impact of these verses should change our outlook and encourage us to trust God to make our tomorrow better than our today.

“The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7b)

Our heart does not have to be sinless, only seeking. God sees and honors a heart that seeks Him. He says, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:13) This means we take what we know of God, whether little or much, and ask God to help us live in agreement with His Word and His will. We make the commitment to worship only Him, ask Him to lead us in life's decisions, and revere His Name and authority.

This kind of seeking does not happen overnight. It requires a daily commitment to an intimate relationship with God. David's kingship did not happen in a day. He was picked to be king when he was young, but not placed on the throne until much later. David's seeking heart grew in trust of and submission to God during his 15 year wait to become king.

As we walk through the Psalms in Book 1 and the subsequent Books in the Series *Trusting God for a Better Tomorrow*, we will learn what David and the other Psalmists learned.

Tomorrow is better when:

- Our future is not shaped by mistakes of the past
- Our pain becomes a place our faith can grow
- Our fear of God is stronger than our fears of the world
- Our sorrow for sin is replaced with the freedom of forgiveness
- Our fervor for revenge surrenders to God's judgment
- Our joy is found in things of God rather than the things of this world

I pray as we study God's Word together you will find hope in His Word and begin to trust God for a better tomorrow.

Psalm 1

Author: Anonymous

The psalmist gives us a glimpse into two lives: the life of the blessed and the life of the wicked. The blessed person walks in the ways of the Lord while the wicked walks in his own ways.

The world suggests our happiness is found in money, education, power, position, pleasure, and possessions. The psalmist provides an alternative to the world's definition by directing us to the source of real happiness, *esher*, the Hebrew word for happy. Authentic happiness belongs to those who do not walk in the counsel of the wicked, stand in the way of sinners, or sit at the feet of mockers.

Personalize the psalmist's advice by redefining it in your own words.

Ex: Do not walk in the counsel of the wicked- surround myself with wise people.

The psalmist tells us the blessed man delights in God's law. *Delight* is defined as pleasure, longing, and desires. It is in God's instructions where satisfaction for our pleasures, longings, and desires can be found. However, in our "gotta-have-it-now" and "me, myself and I" instant society, it is easy to seek satisfaction in places other than the Word of God.

Where do you find satisfaction for your pleasures, longings, and desires?

God gives the same guidance in Joshua 1:8 as the psalmist gives in Psalm 1.
Write Joshua 1:8 verse in the space below.

According to these Scriptures, how can we ensure our pleasures, longings, and desires are satisfied in God's Word?

Those who meditate on the Scripture day and night will have a fruitful and prosperous life. Most of us would agree that we want a life that has a positive effect on others and helps them to experience success. The key to this kind of life is meditating on, not ignoring, God's Word. Meditating on God's instructions means we engage in the thought of, contemplate, and reflect upon them.

Getting into God's Word each day is the *only* way for God's Word to get into us. When His Word is in us, it will guide us to live the fruitful and prosperous life the psalmist describes.

What is the biggest obstacle you face when contemplating or reflecting on God's Word? Is it time? Fear? Comprehension?

Meditating on God's Word is not something that comes easily. This kind of devotion to God's Word requires two things that are a rare commodity these days: time and discipline. In the hurried and demanding lives we lead, carving out time and modifying our schedule for the regular study of God's Word seems nearly impossible. God, the Creator and Keeper of time, inspired Solomon and Paul to address the challenge of schedules.

1. "I don't have time."
Solomon speaks of time management in Ecclesiastes 3:1.
"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven."
2. "I'm just not disciplined and never have been."
Paul speaks of self-discipline in 2 Timothy 1:7.
"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."

Am I determined to trust God with my time, and use the power of self-discipline that is mine as a child of God to regularly read, study, and meditate on God's Word?

3. Another excuse:
"But what if I read something and can't understand it?"

Read Deuteronomy 29:29.

What part of God's Word are we accountable for understanding?

God reveals what He expects us to understand and obey. With this knowledge we can approach God's Word *with* confidence and *without* pressure to understand it all. Instead, we can surrender to the power of the Holy Spirit to work in and through us what He reveals.

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 2

Author: David

In Psalm 2 David identified and confronted those who opposed God. As Israel's king he not only saw opposition to God, he faced personal opposition. In our competitive, fast-track world we are confronted with people who oppose us. Perhaps you face opposition at the office, in your local PTA, from someone on your daughter's cheerleading squad, or maybe in your own home.

David says those who conspire and plot do so in vain. God has all authority. This knowledge brings comfort but does not remove the sting of conspiracy. David faced constant threat of danger, with opposition regularly conspiring against him. He learned how to live victoriously despite the threat of opposition and so can we.

Like David:

- We all are or have been conspired against.
- It is imperative we recognize who is King and who is not.
- We should be ready for battle by living on the defense.

Like David, we can live in victory despite the threat of opposition.

We all are or have been conspired against.

Even though we do not want to believe this level of evil exists, the reality is, it does. We live in a day and age where people conspire, plot, and devise plans of evil against another to advance themselves or to get even. To live victoriously we want to learn how to respond to our conspirators instead of reacting to their schemes.

Read Luke 6:27-28.

In the words of Jesus, how are we to respond to our conspirators?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Am I the only one struggling with these commands? This may not be the Sunday School response but it is an honest one: the last thing I want to do for someone who conspires against me is love and do good to them, much less bless and pray for them. My flesh screams hate, get even, and ignore. However, if I am walking in the ways of the Lord thinking and reflecting on His Word (a throw back the lesson on Psalm 1), then I should obey what He asks me to do, right? This is when the battle between my flesh and spirit is on. My flesh tells my spirit, "Following these commands is not possible for you." I almost believe the lie, almost until I read Jesus' response to what we call impossible.

Read Mark 9:23.

What is possible? For Whom?

God will not ask us to do something that His power will not enable us to carry through.

Recognize Who’s in Charge

We live in a world that shouts, “You are number one. You can do it. You are in control.” With the bellowing of such rhetoric language, it can be challenging to recognize and acknowledge God’s kingship. Crowning Him King of our life will adjust our perspective, enabling us to react correctly to our opposition, and live victoriously in spite of it.

1 Corinthians 8:6 (NASB)

“Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.”

Use the previous verse to fill in the blanks.

There is but one _____. I _____ for Him. I _____ through Him.

Be Ready for Victory

Living out the power of Luke 6:27-28 and in the freedom of 1 Corinthians 8:6 is only part of the equation to responding instead of reacting to our conspirators. As a warrior, David not only recognized God as his authority, he was dressed for victory.

Too often we dress for defeat rather than victory. We wear armor made of wrong thinking, anger, resentment, and revenge. The perfect protective covering is tucked away in Paul’s letter to the church of Ephesus. With God as our Wardrobe Designer defeat is not possible.

Read Ephesians 6:10-17

In the blanks provided describe our perfect protective covering.

Which garment is most challenging for you to wear? Why?

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 3

Author: David

Absalom's threat to take over the throne sends David on the run. He is detained in a vulnerable place both physically and mentally. Alone with his thoughts he cries out to God. Alone with his thoughts, he permits negativity to creep in and momentarily loses perspective.

A Change in Perspective

There are times in our lives when we feel so threatened, we lose perspective. David is experiencing such a time. His armies are vast and more powerful than the armies of Absalom. Yet instead of repeating this truth, he repeats a negative script he heard others say. "God will never deliver him." David recounts that "many" are against him.

Have you been in a place where it felt as if "many" were rising against you? Finances? Relationships? Health issues? Perhaps even today you have lost perspective and are repeating negative scripts. In Romans, Paul teaches a new pattern of thinking, a new script to repeat when our perspective is comprised by "stinkin' thinkin."

Read Romans 8:31.

Write the verse replacing we with I and us with me. Who can stand against you?

With God on our side we are more than conquerors no matter how "many" stand against us.

A Change in Thinking

Our mind is powerful. Its power can cause us to believe the best or imagine the worst. Just as it takes only one negative thought to direct us down the path of mental defeat, it only takes one positive thought to redirect us to mental victory. David intentionally changes his thinking by reciting positive scripts. As he redirects his thoughts we witness his confidence rise and his mental vigor restored.

List some of David's positive scripts. (i.e. "You are my shield.")

Read Philippians 4:8.

How can we redirect and defeat "stinkin' thinkin?"

A Change in Behavior

A change in perspective and change in thinking require a change in behavior. For the life worn down by negativity and habitual “stinkin’ thinkin’” changing behavior seems impossible. We are broken down and defeated from years of warring against the “many,” making the fragrant smell of victory seem unattainable.

Victory in the area of thinking and perspective is accomplished when we intentionally replace negative scripts with positive scripts. The intentional replacing of our negative thoughts is an act of discipline that takes time and tenacity. The experience of victory far exceeds the effort it takes to arrive in victory lane.

There is great power in positive scripts. We feel power fill David as he recites positive scripts in verses 3-8. This same power is available to all who believe in the truth of change. Each of us has the power to change. If you doubt your ability to change, read the Truth.

Locate and read 2 Timothy 1:7. Write the verse in the space below. Circle the words *power* and *self-discipline*.

A Place to Start

Many nay-sayers of change are probably thinking, “I will try, but where do I start?” My precious friend Renee Swope released her life-changing book, *A Confident Heart*, last year. God has used it to set the course for new perspectives and new thinking for thousands of women. Below are just a few positive scripts she shares in her book.

We Say	God Says	Scripture Says
I am tired.	I will give you rest.	Matthew 11:28
I feel so weak.	I will give you power.	2 Corinthians 12:9
My life is too hard.	Let Me help you.	Psalms 91:15
I can’t do it.	Rely on My strength.	Philippians 3:13
I feel overwhelmed.	I will give you peace	John 16:33
I’ll never change.	I am transforming you.	2 Corinthians 3:18
Everyone is against me	I am for you!	Isaiah 43:4
I feel defeated.	You are a conqueror!	Romans 8:37
I’m nothing special.	You are a masterpiece.	Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 4

Author: David

David's glory and authority as king are under attack and he has a word for the people of Israel. He questions their idolatrous life-style and delusional love. I wonder if he ever imagined the impact his words might have on future generations. The challenging words he penned in verse two challenged me and will be the core of this lesson.

How long will you love delusions and seek false gods? Psalm 4:2b

Loving Delusions

Loving comes as natural as learning to walk and talk. Babies and young children naturally respond to kindness with a bashful glow, snuggly love, and big hugs. This natural emotion called love easily becomes distorted and profaned as we journey through the ebb and flow of life in a fallen world.

"Love given but not returned; its purity stolen or innocently given away." (Anonymous)
The result is an injured soul wandering aimlessly, starved for love, and loving—without purpose—the wrong things. Such starvation leaves the injured soul vulnerable, unable to execute good judgment, making her an easy prey to the wrong sources of love. She is brokenhearted and misled into thinking a whole heart experiencing real love is impossible.

Read Psalm 147:3.

What will God do for the brokenhearted?

He longs to heal the broken heart of those wandering aimlessly and who have fallen prey to the wrong sources of love. These can be anything from sexual impurity to idolatry. A life of delusional love can leave one feeling crushed, isolated, and believing no one cares.

Locate and read Psalm 34:18.

How does God respond to a crushed spirit?

Locate and read 1 Peter 5:7.

Who does God care about?

Take a few moments to reread the previous verses and write a personal prayer in the space below. You may use the back if you need additional space.

Think about it: Do you love delusions and seek any false gods? Psalm 4:2b

Seeking False gods

I did not wake up one day and declare, “I am going to seek false gods. Yes, that is exactly what I am going to do; run hard after something that will leave me empty and unfulfilled.” No one makes such a harmful decision on purpose. Seeking false gods is a result of not seeking the right God. It took me years to break the cycle of “seeking false gods,” and through God’s grace I continue to identify and defeat my idolatry.

Innocently wandering from person to possession to activity, I begged others and things to fill my emptiness and give me the fulfillment for which I longed. It wasn’t until I was knee-deep in idolatry that I realized what I had done and the fallacies I believed. Shopping, sleep, and soap operas (and this is only my short list!) had become my wrong reservoirs, my false gods. At thirty-one years of age I asked, “Is this it? Is this as good as it gets?” God whispered to my spirit through the words of the prophet Joel. Today, He whispers to your spirit.

Locate and read Joel 2:12-13.

What does God say to the heart chasing false gods?

As we return, what are His instructions?

Seeking the True God

God asks those who are caught in the cycle of “seeking false gods” to return and rend. We return to Him with all our heart and rend, or remove, any part of our heart that offers affection and allegiance to another god. This kind of work, returning and rending, takes time and a team effort.

Read John 14:26.

Who is on your team making the return to God and rending of your heart possible?

David’s gentle instructions in verse 4 teach us how to begin seeking the True God: “Search your hearts and be silent.” As we search in silence God our Teammate will be cheering for us and confirming to us what God would have us do.

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 5

Author: David

David addresses two obstacles that have caused me to stumble in my prayer life. I successfully avoided them for a long time. Then out of the blue, life threw a few curve balls and while trying to make the catch, these obstacles caused me to topple. These prayer obstacles are sleep and impatience. Perhaps you have lost your balance and have been tripped by them as well.

The Obstacle of Sleep

“I am not a morning person” was my mantra for years. The snooze button was my best friend and sleeping until the last possible second was my norm. My norm that is until about a decade ago.

My life was a mess. My marriage was a mess. And my children were getting lost in the mess. Each new day seemed to be more out of balance than the one before. Unable to change the situation myself, as a last resort I cried out to God for help. Never did I imagine His help would require my surrender: the surrender of something I loved so dearly, sleep.

Through a Bible study the Lord led me to a verse in Isaiah that removed the sleep obstacle from my prayer life. Isaiah says of God, “*He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught* (Isaiah 50:4).” My mantra was no longer applicable. No excuse seemed acceptable. Through the power of this verse, I was now a morning person.

Verse 4 teaches two powerful truths about the morning and God:

- God wakes us up each morning and readies our ears to listen.
- God has something to say to us each morning.

Read Isaiah 50:4-5.

How did Isaiah refer to himself if he turns his back when God awakens him?

I have to be honest with you; I trusted in the truth of verse 4 because of the truth in verse 5. The thought of starting each new day in rebellion to God frightened this southern girl out of bed with a “Good Morning” on my lips and a “Yes Sir” in my spirit.

The Morning

The morning brings new hope as its peace and quiet drowns out the noise and glamour of our day’s agenda. The morning gives light and a new perspective to yesterday’s mess. It shouts optimism to our obstacles and possibility to our problems. David wasn’t the only man in the Bible in the habit of meeting with God in the morning. Another man in the Bible found hope and perspective in the morning.

Read Mark 1:35.

What was this man's name?

In Isaiah 50:4 we learned God has equipped us all to be morning people. He has given us ears to hear and listen to His instructions. As I began to trust this truth, my prayer obstacle of sleep was removed, my days began to have balance, and life's difficult circumstances did not seem so hard. God can do the same for you, and for anyone who trusts Him with the first few minutes of each day. God is in the obstacle-removing business. He is waiting to remove your obstacle(s).

What is the biggest obstacle to my prayer time?

The Obstacle of Impatience

The minute I finish my prayer time I am poised for God's answer. Waiting is not part of my plan, but it is part of God's. David demonstrates his confidence in God when he says, "I wait in expectation." (v3) I demonstrate doubt in God when my answer does not come quickly and I move forward with "Plan B" to help God out. Our Plan B can never match the greatness of God's Plan A. This being true, what do we do as we wait with expectation on the fruition of Plan A?

Read Ephesians 3:12.

How should we approach God?

Read Romans 8:28.

How does God work all things out for those who love Him?

We can approach God with confidence and faith trusting in His good plans. While we wait in expectation we love Him and walk according to His purposes as He fulfills His great Plan A to its fullness in our lives according to His clock and calendar, not ours.

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 6

Author: David

Psalm 6 is one of seven psalms referred to as penitential psalms or psalms of sorrows. David demonstrates penitence, regret for his sin, as he pours his heart out to the Lord. David was a great king, victorious warrior, and “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Sam.13:14). Yet in all his greatness and splendor, David was like you and me - a sinner.

The Place Where Confession Begins

As a little girl when I did something wrong my mother would expect me to face my father about what I had done. With sadness and regret I would confess my offense. After confessing I would ask, “Daddy, do you still love me?” Without hesitation he would reply, “You can’t do anything that will make me not love you.” My dad was able to see sorrow in my heart and he forgave my offense, every time.

Read Psalm 51:17.

What sacrifices will God *not* despise?

David approaches his Heavenly Daddy like I approached my earthly daddy: with a broken and contrite heart. His anguished soul and weak bones are evidence of the weight of his sin. His tear-soaked bed is proof of sincere remorse. With our honest heart-felt confession God will lift the weight of our sin, leaving us free of all guilt and shame.

Is approaching God with a broken and contrite heart difficult for you? Why or why not?

Verse 9 boasts of David’s confidence in God to hear his plea. He is certain of God’s faithfulness to forgive his sin. As we approach our Heavenly Daddy, with our broken and contrite heart in confession, we can have the same assurance as David.

Read 1 John 1:9.

Write it in the space below.

Spend the remainder of today’s lesson trusting the truth of 1 John 1:9.

After sharing your broken and contrite heart you may ask, “Daddy, do you still love me?” Without hesitation His response is, “You can’t do anything that will make me not love you.”

Fill your heart with His truth.

Romans 8:37-39

Romans 5:8

Deuteronomy 7:9

The Price of Denial

The resolution that accompanies making things right with our Father through confession brings unparalleled peace. We experience quite the opposite results when we withhold our confession. The price of denial is separation from God. In verse 4 David feels this separation as he asks God to “turn back to him.” God will pull out all the stops to mend a broken relationship with one of His children, from withholding blessings to permitting physical illness.

The Lord speaks very loudly in times of silence as I once learned while preparing to lead an event. I needed God to speak to me, but He was silent. My fingers could not type, my heart would not connect to a verse, and my spirit felt low. The distance between God and I grew farther and farther as the day of the event drew closer. I could take the heaviness no longer. Finally, I approached God as David did, pouring my heart and concerns out to Him, asking Him to reveal and heal me of my sin. He was faithful to forgive because I was willing to confess. His freedom rushed through my body filling me with the energy and vigor required to lead the event.

Think about it: Perhaps there has been a time when God has pulled out all the stops to repair His relationship with you. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving to Him now.

Or, are you experiencing a loud silence from the Lord today? Is there heaviness in your spirit that will not disappear no matter how many new outfits you purchase or lunches with friends you have? The price of denial is far too great. Like David, turn back to God and from a place of repentance ask Him to turn back to you.

The Peace of Reconciliation

The absence of peace brings agitation, frustration, and worry. Combined, these deliver sleepless nights and indescribable sorrow. David talks about his groaning, his tear-stained bed, and the decline of his physical strength. There is nothing like the peace that accompanies restoration in our relationship with Christ. Through our confession, we meet the God of Peace, Yahweh Shalom. No more silence. No more sleepless nights with pillows stained with tears. No more worn out days, because physical strength is renewed. His peace transcends all our troubles.

Read Philippians 4:7.

What benefits come through the peace of God?

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 7

Author: David

Whether on his throne making decisions for the nations, hiding in a stronghold from his enemy, or on the frontline of battle, David is confronted with situations that seek to extinguish his mental state. Someone who David thought was on his side, identified only as Cush a Benjamite, has made slanderous accusations against David to King Saul. Many of us have had to face hurting and slanderous words spoken about us.

Words Can Hurt

“Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me” is part of a children’s poem recited by generations. For years I mindlessly repeated these words to myself until one day it dawned on me: words do hurt me. Moreover, I realized my words hurt other people.

Words hurt.

Several years ago I was sitting in my Sunday School class minding my own business when another’s painful words echoed in my heart and soul. They changed my life. The memory of a friend reading the hurtful words of Ephesians 4:29 are forever etched in my memory.

Read Ephesians 4:29. Write it in the space below.

Paul’s words hurt me, but in a good way. They convicted me about the way I use my words and made me realize they have the power to hurt or heal. The words I had been using were not encouraging nor did they benefit those who listened. They had been gossipy, tearing down instead of building up. My conversations were far from beautiful, beneficial, and pure.

In order for the right words to come out of our mouths, the right words must go into our hearts. Luke 6:45 says, “For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.” After hearing Paul’s hurtful but helpful words and learning this truth from Luke, I began putting the right things in my heart by asking myself some tough questions.

1. What am I watching?
2. What am I listening to?
3. What am I reading?
4. Who am I hanging out with?
5. Where do I spend my time?

Give yourself the same self-examination to discover how you are filling your heart. God wants our words to be gifts. Let’s package them beautifully before giving them away. What does your reflection reveal?

Words Can Heal

Our natural response to false accusations and hurtful words is defensiveness. We seek to heal our pain by retaliating with destructive words aimed at those who have hurt us. David fought this natural instinct by crying out for divine assistance.

Sometimes the words that heal are the words left unsaid. Fighting the desire to reciprocate unkind words has not been easy for me. Having the last word is my natural bend. It is only through the power of God's Word in Psalm 141:3 that I have been able to successfully win the war with my tongue.

Read Psalm 141:3.

What divine assistance do we ask God to provide?

By allowing the Lord to keep watch over our lips, we give Him control of what is said as well as what remains unsaid. His Word supplies all the power we need to replace hurting words with healing words.

Read the following verses of "Word Power" for our words.

Proverbs 12:18

What brings healing?

Proverbs 16:24

In your words describe gracious (healing) words.

Spread Healing

Read Psalm 19:14.

David surrenders his anger instead of letting it have power over him. Words hurt. Words heal. Can we challenge ourselves to spread healing? If someone speaks disrespectfully with hurtful words, respond with wholesome words, keeping the conversation pure. In dialogues with one another, we can exchange words that build each other up benefiting everyone who listens.

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 8

Author: David

As I read and meditate on David's hymn of praise, I wonder if he ever had an issue with self-worth. Did David ever determine his worth by his sin and faux pas? Had he ever fallen into a crater of comparison?

For much of my life I allowed my worth to be determined by the wrong things and fell in numerous craters of comparisons. This fallacy continues to be an ongoing struggle for me and probably will be as long as there is a "her."

In the Image of Him not "Her"

As a young girl many of my actions, reactions, and responses to life were determined by "her." You remember her. She wore Izod not Bug-Off, leather instead of pleather, and her Levi's weren't knock-offs. She succeeded at everything, lost nothing, and was liked by everyone. I wanted to be *her* and believed I was created to be like *her*.

This lie ushered me into adulthood where I heard about *her* perfect job, and was invited to *her* perfect house to have a perfect dinner with *her* perfect family. Intimidated, I wanted my life to reflect her image. I fell victim to no self-worth rather than living victoriously in my worth as a child of God.

Believing the truth of Genesis 1:28 is pivotal in learning to live in the image of *Him* rather than *her*.

Read Genesis 1:27

In whose image were you created?

There is nothing we can do to lose or add to our worth in the eyes of God. No sin, no mistakes, and no failures change how God feels about us. We have worth because we are created in His image. We cannot permit our worth to be dictated by our feelings, because let's face it, we are women and our feelings change more often than we change shoes.

Read Galatians 3:28-29.

When we *feel* worthless and powerless to live up to extent of our worth as a child of God, we should take captive the negative and make it obedient to God's Truth. (2 Corinth.10:5)

Regardless of how I feel:

- *I have great value because I am created in the image of God.*
- *I am a co-heir with Christ and therefore it is impossible for me to be without worth.*

Determining our worth by anything other than the truth of what God's Word says about us discounts the greatness of God's creativity and reduces the significance of the sacrifice of His Son.

Living Worthy

When we learn to live life in the extent of our worth in Christ instead of in response to our feelings, we experience victory, the greatness of God's creativity is illumined, and the significance of Christ's death on the cross touches our heart in a new way.

In this new way of living our countenance changes from downtrodden to uplifted, and our stature shifts from uncertain to confident. We are filled with the overwhelming desire to please God and obey all He asks us to do. In living worthy, we learn to trust Him to work out all things in our life for our good. (Romans 8:28)

Living worthy has its rewards that could amaze and perhaps even startle the most mature believer if experienced fully. God rewards when we earnestly seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). I have chosen to highlight three rewards.

Reward 1: Power

Read Ephesians 1:18-20.

To whom is the incomparable power given?

Reward 2: Authority

Read James 4:7.

What authority do we have in Christ?

Reward 3: Wisdom, Knowledge, and Happiness

Read Ecclesiastes 2:26.

To whom does God give these rewards?

With a rewards system like this, who would not want to please God? The one who lives worthy has power to do all things (Philippians 4:13), send the devil on his way, and be filled with wisdom, knowledge, and happiness. The first step to living this life is to accept who we are in Christ and live like we believe it. Are you ready to live?

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 9

Author: David

Is expressing praise to the Lord easy or difficult for you? How about giving God thanks or asking Him to come to your aid? Before I knew the Lord intimately, my prayers were full of requests, peppered with praise, and some thanks was thrown in for good measure.

It is obvious that David knows the Lord intimately. He has learned to depend on God, recognizing His power in his life. Through this intimate relationship, David now understands how to pray and teaches us. David's model teaches: Praise comes first, thanks is second, and asking is last.

Praise Comes First

David's model starts with praise. It is easy to use praise and thanks interchangeably, almost as synonyms; however, they are not synonyms. Breaking down our prayer model will help us understand the difference in the two words and the important part each word plays in our model prayer.

Praise is defined as the act of expressing approval or admiration; commendation. In our praise we tell God how much we adore Him and celebrate who He is. The NIV Bible commentary defines praise as an outward expression of our inward attitude. In order for our outward expression to be pleasing to God, we must check our inward attitude.

An Attitude check

Anyone who knows me will confirm that I can throw some attitude. At 43, I have perfected the slight turn of the head, feet apart at ready stance, and hands on the hip `tude. I am embarrassed to confess I have taken this `tude into my prayer closet, acting entitled to answers and upset because things are not going my way. As we approach our Creator through prayer, it is necessary to lose the `tude. In a loose translation of 1 Peter 2:1-3 Peter advises, "since we have tasted the Lord's goodness it is time to grow up and get rid of some stuff."

Read 1 Peter 2:1.

What does Peter recommend we get rid of?

In the conclusion of chapter 1, Peter is talking to believers in Christ about obedience, holiness, and the steadfastness of God's Word. He urges them to rid themselves of anything that would keep them from obeying God or pursuing holiness. With the absence of such attitudes our inward attitude, and consequently our outward expression, will be pleasing to God. Oh, that I would have the right attitude.

Which attitude is most challenging for you to get rid of? Why?

Our Thanks Is Next

While praise lifts up the name of God for who He is, thanks celebrates what He has done. *Thanks* is defined as an informal expression of gratitude, appreciation, and acknowledgement. When we have exalted the name of Jesus through praise, our hearts will naturally overflow with words of thanks and gratitude. David counts his blessings, naming them one by one in verses 3 through 12.

No Rhyme or Reason

Our prayers of thanks do not have to be formal with lofty sounding words like David's. I remember when I was young: during Sunday School we thanked God "popcorn style." Informally, with no rhyme or reason and in no specific order, we would call out things for which we were thankful. Pop! Pop! Pop! Gratitude is an awesome sound! Everyone wants to be thanked and appreciated for what they have done, and God is no different.

In the space below, informally "pop" thanks to God. Once you get started you may have to carry the "pop" to the back of the page.

Now, imagine the thrill this brings to our Lord's heart. Shouldn't we thrill the Lord like this every day?

We Ask Last

God hears the prayers of all of His children, all of the time. God will not leave or fail anyone who has knowledge of, recognizes, and is acquainted with His renown, glory, and reputation. Those who seek Him with care, inquiring information by asking questions will not ever be refused. There isn't anything we cannot or should not ask God.

Read Ephesians 6:18a.

Write it in the space below. Circle the word *all*.

How will the knowledge of this truth affect your prayer life?

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 10

Author: Anonymous

When I hear the word *wicked* my mind paints an image of a hairy, scary, and dirty person trying to act inconspicuous while waiting to commit a crime.

Wicked is defined as a criminal, one guilty of crime. It is also defined as one who is hostile toward God or guilty of sin against God or man. The last time I looked in the mirror, I was not hairy or scary. Even though my reflection in the mirror doesn't match my idea of a wicked person, my sin lines up with the definition of the word Ouch!

Wicked is not a characteristic trait I want to describe me. My desire when I look in the mirror is to see a reflection of a woman following hard after God, working continually against things that lead me in the opposite direction of my pursuit.

Working Against Wickedness

Our sin nature is inherited from Adam and Eve. You could say, "It's in our genes." But claiming gene contamination is not an excuse for habitual sin and the pursuit of things unpleasing to God. Praise the Lord, we are not alone in this fight. The Holy Spirit is our helper. He empowers, leads, and guides us against the natural pull of sin.

When working *against* wickedness we are working *for* what is decent, good, and godly. The author of Psalm 10 describes in great detail the life and lifestyle of living in wickedness. In describing the life of the wicked, he also describes the life of the godly. In our lesson this week, we will learn about the lifestyle of the godly.

Room for God: Humility vs Arrogance (vs.2-5)

Those pursuing godliness make room in our lives for God. Room is made as seeking Him becomes a lifestyle. We revere, not revile Him. His Word is something we long to obey, not hold in contempt. In the pursuit of godliness, a transformation occurs inwardly that is reflected outwardly. Our arrogance fades into humility, greed turns to generosity, and the cravings of our heart shift from self-focused to serve-focused.

Read Philippians 2:3.

How does Paul say we can work against pride?

The path from arrogance to humility, greed to generosity, and self to selfless is not a path without twists, turns, and obstacles. What does Proverbs 3:6 about our path?

Proverbs 3:6 does not tell us to make our path straight. It says, as we acknowledge God, He will do all the work. It is easy to make room for a God like that, don't you think?

How exciting to know our God does the work on our behalf as we seek Him and His direction!

Keep His Word Close: God-Dependent vs. Self-Sufficient (vs.4-6)

In living a godly life, we not only need to make room for God, but we also need to keep His Word close to our heart. Keeping His Word close teaches us to depend on God rather than ourselves. God-dependency leads to a deep abiding joy and success that self-sufficiency cannot create no matter how hard we work to achieve it. Living a God-dependent life naturally produces humility and willfully forfeits the spotlight, giving God the glory for success. Such a life is found through God’s life-giving Word.

Read Psalm 119:11.

How can we keep God’s Word close to our heart?

A daily quiet time with God and His Word is the only way to know and hide His Truth in our heart. As we read, study, and learn God’s Word, His Truth becomes part of us, making living a godly life and working against wickedness possible.

Put Godly In: Truth vs. Lies (vs.7)

With God’s Word hidden in our hearts, we are less likely to sin against Him or bring harm to others. His Word determines for us what is right and wrong, good or bad. It will also help us prevent our hearts from being filled with things that are not of God.

Read Luke 6:45.

What does the mouth speak?

When His Truth is in, it will flow out. The question we must ask ourselves is, “What is really in our hearts?” Let’s ask God to help us have the desire to know Him and His Word, then submit to Him, giving Him time to answer our prayer.

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 11

Author: David

As a boy David spent countless hours in the hills of Bethlehem, tending to his father's sheep. It was on these hillsides where David became intimately acquainted with God. Day after day, David would care for his sheep and God would care for David. He learned more than just tending sheep in those days. He came to know God as a place of refuge and One he could trust when there was no one else around. I can imagine David longed for the quiet days spent on Bethlehem's hillside with just his sheep and his Lord.

What are your "go-to" places for refuge and hiding?

Finding Refuge

Flashes of glittering shoes are in my mind. As the echo of clicking heels fills the air I hear Dorothy's words, "There's no place like home. There's no place like home." For some, home is a place of refuge, safety, and security, while for others it is the last place they find refuge.

A refuge is anything to which one has recourse for aide, relief, or escape. David discovered, regardless of his physical location or emotional condition, his recourse for aide, relief, and escape was the Lord. The Lord was David's "go-to" place for relief. As much as we want God to be our "go-to" place of escape, it is easy to seek relief from some uncertain "go-to" places.

There was a time in my life when my recourse for relief was anything but God. Running to the mall or a discount store was my place of reprieve. I would remove myself physically from my troubles and satisfy myself emotionally with a cute new outfit (on sale of course). It didn't take long to discover, refuge from any source other than God delivers disappointment instead of relief.

Have you ever sought refuge in uncertain places? According to Hebrews 13:5, one thing is for certain when we escape to anywhere but God.

Read Hebrews 13:5.

What is certain in the midst of uncertainty?

Read Nahum 1:7.

What kind of refuge is the Lord? Who does He care for?

God is our good and certain refuge we can count on at all times. Making this truth part of life requires trust and discipline.

Making God our Go-To Place of Refuge

Trust

Trust is not easy. Let's face it; we've all discovered that people let us down. After being rejected and wounded, we become skittish to trust again. What's the old saying? "Hurt me once, shame on you. Hurt me twice, shame on me."

God will not let us down. It is not within His nature. His plans are for us, not against us and include a future of hope, not disaster (Jeremiah 29:11). As we practice trusting His plan and His ways, making Him our "go-to" place of refuge becomes second nature instead of something we do after all the substitutes have failed.

Read Proverbs 3:5-6.

What advice does King Solomon give?

Discipline

Practicing takes time. I was in my mid-thirties, married, mother of two, and already set in *my* ways by the time I experienced the disillusionment that accompanies wrong places of refuge. *My* ways weren't working out so well. As a last resort I decided to try *His* ways.

Trying *His* ways meant change, and change required self-discipline. I had convinced myself that I did not have self-discipline and was too old to change (at the time mid-thirties seemed old). Through Bible study, I stumbled upon a verse that convinced me otherwise.

Read 2 Timothy 1:7.

Write the verse in the space below. Circle the words *power* and *self-discipline*.

The Lord is in His Temple

We can have hope: the Lord is in His Temple no matter what happens. God is keenly aware of those around us bending their bows, sitting arrows against the string. He sees them in the shadow waiting to release the arrow of insult, judgment, cruelty, and trouble. He is in His Temple, on His throne observing, and He is the One and only place of true refuge in times of trouble.

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 12

Author: David

“Where Did the Godly Go?”

The godly and faithful have vanished and King David is concerned. As we go through our day at school, place of business, our community, and even church, we might wonder the same thing. I had to ask myself, “Am I concerned? Have I become apathetic to the decline of the godly and unconcerned that the faithful are rejecting the ways of the Lord?”

Think about what your answer to the previous questions might be.

The godly have decided to blend in with the rest of the world and determined it is easier to go with the flow than against the current. The faithful have found it easier to conform rather than transform, to concede instead of contradict. Little by little the godly are vanishing. On behalf of the Church, let’s cry out, “Help, LORD!” For our own sake, let’s cry out, “Help, LORD!” and renew our commitment by returning to the basics.

The Basics

When I was a teacher, each fall my curriculum calendar for the school year included four weeks for review. It was important to refresh the students’ minds with what they had already learned. Doing this built their confidence and helped secure a foundation for learning new concepts.

Our faith and relationship with the Lord is the same way. Refreshing and renewing our minds with what we know helps build our confidence to learn and apply more.

Read Romans 12:1-3. Keep your Bible open. We will be here for a while.

Paul is speaking to Christians in Rome. He describes the basics of how the godly can live in an ungodly world. Sound familiar? The practical advice Paul gave *then* applies to us *now*.

What is the first “basic” Paul instructs Christians to do? (V1)

Surrender

Forfeiting sounds as if we are required to give up all fun and freedom. Nothing could be further from the truth. In God’s economy forfeiting, leads to freedom. I cannot explain how such a thing is true; it is supernatural. Sacrifice sets us free, free to live godly in an ungodly world. The bonus to such a lifestyle is pleasing God.

Pause to pray. Share your thoughts, fears, and concerns about surrender and sacrifice with God.

Think about it: Is pleasing God worth forfeiting what I hold most dear? Is this a tough question to consider?

Conform to God's Ways

Little by little it happened, without notice. One day we turned on the television to witness a new line of indecency crossed. We opened the paper to read the plight of the poor, needy, hungry, and homeless. The godly watch and read but have failed to respond. The godly have taken the road of least resistance and conformed.

Read Romans 12:2.

What does Paul warn the godly not to do?

Conform means to act in accordance with the prevailing standards, attitudes, and practices, of society or a group. Our standards, attitudes, and practices are outlined in scripture. We can gain confidence in our faith and strengthen our resolve to stand against injustices and the world's standards by following the advice Paul gives in verse 3.

What does Paul advise the godly to do in verse 2?

Change the Way We Think

Each day the Lord will teach us all things necessary to live godly in order to transform our ungodly world one courageous stance at a time. The Greek meaning of renewing is a change of heart and life. The change of heart comes through the study of scripture. The change of life is demonstrated in our response to what we have learned.

Read James 1:22.

According to James, what should our response to God's Word be?

Consider Others First

Considering others is a challenge for me. Most days, I naturally would prefer to take care of only myself. I have learned when we surrender our plan to God's, conform to His ways, and renew our mind with His Word, considering others becomes second nature.

Where did the godly go?

The godly are here. We have gotten a little sidetracked, but are headed back to the basics to change our world.

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

You are tired.

You are lonely.

You want out.

You ask, "How long Lord? How long will things be this way?"

Living How Long

Several years ago my husband began to experience health problems that were extreme and unexpected for a young man. For eighteen months we lived in *how long*. The toll it took on our lives was great. We walked in despair most days. Our uncertain future and painful present left our faith weak. Like David, we tried to depend on God and cried out for deliverance. There was not an immediate answer, but leaning on God's strength in our time of weakness made the *how long* bearable while supernaturally growing our faith.

Are you living in the unbearable days of *how long*? The *how long* of unemployment, a prodigal child, a life-threatening diagnosis, or a lonely heart? When we are in *how long* God expects us to cry out to Him, casting all our cares and anxieties on Him. God may choose to immediately deliver you out or choose to deliver you through your *how long*. In either case, you can be confident your deliverance will be perfectly timed, bringing you good and God glory.

Read 1 Peter 5:7.

Why should we cast our cares on God?

Knowing God cares enables us to withstand both the sting and stay of our *how long*. This assurance opens our eyes to see God work. As we see God work, patience is produced, strengthening our belief in our deliverance.

Fight for Deliverance

Sometimes our stay in *how long* seems imminent and we become discouraged, losing all hope for deliverance. We can feel the enemy's breath on our neck as he corners us in a place of desperation. It is when the enemy hovers over us that we must draw our sword (Ephesians 6:17), and fight for deliverance.

David was losing hope. He needed to know that God had not forgotten Him. In his desperate place of darkness, David asked God to look to him and shed light on his *how long*. In soliciting God to restore his hope, God supernaturally supplied the power and confidence in God.

In our *how long*, we can draw our sword, pray David's prayer, and receive the same supernatural power and confidence.

Read Isaiah 55:11.

What confidence belongs to those who pray God's Word?

Praying in *How Long*

While living in the *how long* of my husband's illness, prayer was at the top of my short list of what to do. Sadly though, it was not always my first response when a moment of hurt, indecision, or crisis would arise. Anxiety would set in, causing my natural instinct to supersede the spiritual response to pray.

As we read Psalm 16, we hear distress and anxiety in David's voice. Despite his anxious heart, his spiritual response superseded his natural instinct. He directed his fretful thoughts, full of questions, to God. David's *natural* instinct had become *spiritual*. He knew praying would transform his *how long* and bring peace of mind. A lesson every child of God would benefit from learning.

Read Philippians 4:6-7.

In what type of situations should we pray? What happens when we pray?

It is through prayer that our *natural* instinct becomes *spiritual*. This transformation of thinking and responding enables us to dwell in our *how long* with hope for deliverance.

Praising in *How Long*

In just a few short verses David's prayer changes from *how long* to *hallelujah*. Through prayer, David remembers God's past faithfulness, encouraging him to trust in God's future provision. Has his situation changed? Has his enemy suddenly decided to surrender? No. David was not delivered from the situation, but he was released from its despair. His anxiety was replaced with a new song of praise.

Read Psalm 40:3.

Who provided David with a new song?

As we pray, God will not only guard our mind and heart with peace; He will put a hymn of praise on our lips! These benefits produce endurance and unity with God, making living in *how long* an experience worthy of praise.

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 14

Author: David

I've Been a Fool

Dr. Raymond Sanderson took my hand as I walked the aisle at the tender age of eight to accept Jesus as my Savior. Since that day I have “known” there is a God; no one could convince me otherwise. But knowing there is a God and living like there is a God are two entirely different things.

In my late twenties I got mad at God and stayed mad for several years. I attended church because that is what you do on Sunday. Monday through Saturday though I was on my own, living for my own pleasures and indulgences, not giving any regard to God, His Word, or His commands. For all intents and purposes I convinced my heart “there was no God for me.” Living as a practical atheist, I was a fool!

Think about it: *Have you ever been a fool?*

How Do Fools Live?

King Solomon wrote a plethora of proverbs describing how a fool lives and what a fool does. In our study today we will hit the highlights.

Complete the statements below by reading the following passages.

A fool finds pleasure in _____	Prov. 10:23
A fool will not _____	Prov. 12:15
A fool is _____	Prov. 14:16
A fool delights in _____	Prov. 18:2
A fool is _____	Prov. 20:3
A fool gives full vent _____	Prov. 29:11

A fool believes the enemy’s lie that God would not allow disappointment and heartache to touch those He loves. Believing this lie, a fool tells his heart, “there is no God for me.” No-one has to live powerless and victimized by the enemy. The enemy’s lies can be defeated with the truth of God’s Word.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:5.

What does Paul tell us to do with every thought?

By holding questionable thoughts up to the light of God’s Truth, the foolish can clearly see their fallacy. With the knowledge of God’s Truth, the lie masquerading truth is defeated. By reading, studying, and applying God’s Word on a daily basis we can be prepared for battle when truth is challenged.

How are you challenged by 2 Corinthians 10:5?

Living like God Exists

Those who live like God exists not only believe in Him, they believe Him. Hebrews 11:6 says, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” The key to believing Him is in the seeking. When we seek Him, we will discover His promises are true. His truth gives us confidence to live knowing and believing He exists.

Both the Hebrews passage and Psalm 14 refer to seeking God. When both Hebrews 11:6 and Psalm 14:2 are considered we discover: God is seeking those who are seeking Him. Those who seek Him find He is believable and live like He exists.

Seek means to search out or try to find something.

What do you spend most of your time seeking?

The one who lives like God exists seeks, submits, and surrenders to Him. He is the opposite of a fool.

Use the Proverbs scriptures to identify the opposite of a fool.

Praying For the Fools

“Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion!” Zion represents Jerusalem, the Holy City. David cares enough for those who do not worship the God of Israel to pray for them. He is aware of the depravity of their life without God. He knows agony and disappointment befalls the person who lives like God does not exist.

Do you know anyone who is headed for a future of agony and disappointment, living like God does not exist? Will you pray for that person’s salvation today?

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Who Is Worthy?

Did you immediately feel disqualified to dwell in the Lord's presence when you read the words, "blameless, speaks truth, no slander, and does no wrong?" Let's consider some details before we count ourselves unworthy.

The Ark of the Covenant was God's dwelling place and resided in the Tabernacle. The Spirit of God dwelled on the Mercy Seat behind the curtain. Only the High Priest was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies and the presence of God.

The death of Jesus tore the curtain that separated the presence of God from man (Matt. 27:51). The ripping of the curtain gave everyone full access to the Holy Spirit through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Instead of dwelling in one place, we are His dwelling place. How is that for being worthy!

The Guidelines

David spelled out a pretty intimidating list of "qualifications" for those worthy of being in the presence of God. I shudder to think how the Israelites responded to the list. Without the Holy Spirit's invention such living would be impossible. As New Testament believers, saved by grace through faith in Jesus, we have the gift of the Holy Spirit to assist us in the kind of life God wants us to live, the kind of life worthy of the abiding presence of the Spirit of God.

In the light of this new information, with confidence that we are worthy to abide in the presence of God and knowing we are His dwelling place, let's study David's list of qualifications.

Blameless

Blameless means complete, without guilt. This intimidating adjective is first used to describe Noah in Genesis 6:9. Scripture says, "Noah walked with God." Noah was complete and remained in a right-standing with God, walking in obedience to Him. Blameless does not mean perfect it means; forgiven.

Read Acts 3:19.

How can we remain complete without guilt before God?

What are the two results of repentance?

I love these words from Matthew Henry concerning repentance. It is more than apologizing for sin. "*Repentance is not a change of mind; it is a change of method. It is much easier to bring a bullock or lamb to be burned upon the altar than to bring every high thought into obedience to God to make our will subject to His will.*"

Taming our Tongue

This one is so hard for me. God blessed me with a dry sense of humor and a helping of sarcasm on the side. When I become upset with someone, I can chew them up, spit 'em out, and walk away smiling. Believe me; I know such behavior is not God-honoring or people encouraging. God has had a few things to say to me about it.

James compares our tongues to a bit in the mouth of a horse or the rudder of a boat. Although small, the bit controls the horse and the rudder the boat. (For more read James 3:3-9.) Our tongues, though small, are to be used to bless not curse, encourage not tear down, and speak truth not slander.

Recognizing and confessing my tongue-wagging has given me freedom I never thought possible. The Lord showed me a verse to pray on those occasions when my "chew them up, spit 'em out" attitude is about to be exposed. I feel quite sure He will not mind if you use it as well.

Read Psalm 141:3. Write the verse in the space below. Commit to praying this truth.

Loving our Neighbor

Keeping your word, honoring your fellow man, lending money with a handshake, are all throw backs from the good' ole days. A man's handshake was as good as his word and a man's name meant something. These days we have contracts, agreements, lawsuits, and liabilities. How did things get so complicated? We have forgotten the golden rule: the simple truth of treating others the way we want to be treated. These simplicities are lost both inside and outside the body of Christ. Imagine the difference the world would see if Christians loved their neighbors.

Jesus had a word or two to say about this subject. His words are included in three out of the four gospels.

Read Luke 10:27. Write the verse on the lines below.

When we love the Lord God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind we find it possible to follow David's guidelines for remaining unmoved and on course in the Presence of God.

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Within our pleasant boundaries and secure lot, God’s portion may include adversity, hardship, and suffering. His cup may contain difficulties. On the other side of difficulties awaits our delightful inheritance.

David lived much of his life running from Saul while waiting to receive his delightful inheritance, the throne of Israel. In the running he learned some secrets to waiting on God’s perfect and sovereign plan. We will discover David’s secrets in our study this week.

Secret 1: Apart From God I Have No Good Thing

As harpist for the king, David enjoyed the bounty of palace life. He was bathed in luxury, wealth, and had every advantage. With all his benefits he concludes, “Apart from God I have no good thing.” David found this truth through the hardships and trials he experienced. When God is all you’ve got, you find He is all you need. No material riches are necessary. God is the good thing.

David attended the school of hard knocks where every adversity was a perseverance-generating, faith-producing lesson. Most of us would agree the hardships we face, or have faced, pale in comparison to all David experienced. However, the degree of difficulty doesn’t matter, does it? When you are walking the road of pain, sorrow, heartache, and disappointment, suffering is still suffering. Just like David, when we go through challenging times, we come out on the other side with stronger faith.

Read James 1:1-3.

Paul teaches that faith produces perseverance. What benefit belongs to the one who allows perseverance to complete its work?

When faced with hardships and trials, we are tempted to find a quick resolution not a reason for joy. Paul counsels us to let the trial work itself out. He had discovered like David, our faith matures through trials, preparing us to receive and live out our delightful inheritance.

Just like David we can allow our portion and pleasant boundaries to develop within us a strong relationship with the Lord so we can say, “There is no good thing apart from the Lord.”

Has God assigned you a portion that has been difficult? How has the boundary proven pleasant? Have you seen God’s inheritance through the circumstance?

Secret 2: Run Only After One God

After learning the Ten Commandments at a young age, I confidently stamped, “obeyed” by just about all of them, especially Exodus 20:3, “You shall have no other gods before me.” My confidence waned, however, as I began to study idolatry. With great conviction, my stamp had to be removed.

An idol or god is anything we regard with abandoned adoration or devotion. If it pulls our devotion and adoration away from God, it is an idol. Ouch! The weight of this knowledge fell heavy on my spirit. The light of God’s Word exposed other gods. As much as I hated to admit it, I had been running after at least four other gods. I called them the “Four S’s”: shopping, sleep, soap operas, and self.

What happens when we run after other gods? (Psalm 16:4) After what or who are you currently running?

I’m in favor of “sorrow relief” not “sorrow increase.” How about you?

Secret 3: Accept My Boundaries

The grass always looks greener on the other side of the fence, doesn’t it? Failing to accept the portion God assigns leads to jealousy and envy. When I feel the twinge of envy, I repeat what my friend Lysa taught me to say, “I am not equipped or qualified to handle what she has, good or bad.” Consider the freedom of Lysa’s words.

God redraws our boundary lines and changes our portion as we mature in our faith. Within our pleasant boundaries He gives instruction necessary for the next part of His plan. If we allow ourselves to be distracted by jealousy and envy, we will be unable to follow His directions and counsel.

Read Jeremiah 29:11-13.

What plans does God have for you? Who will be found when we seek?

The boundaries God sets for us are for our safety and security. God’s plans are good, full of hope, and perfectly timed. We can seek and find Him as we stay within the safety and security of our boundaries.

I love secrets. Don’t you? And these are secrets you can share.

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 17

Author: David

Once again we hear David praying from a place of pain, seeking vindication. He feels the breath of his accuser on his neck and calls out to God for an acquittal. David demonstrates respect to God by asking Him to hear his prayer, then begs God to listen.

In simpler terms: “God, I know You can hear my prayer. I also want You to do something about it.”

“I am sure I am innocent!”

David’s words are confident and sure. He declares his innocence before his Holy God. This is bold, don’t you think? Approaching God with such confident innocence can only come from a heart that is “prayed up.” This term is not found in a Bible dictionary or book of theological terms. I made it up years ago (smile) and I think it fits David to a “T.”

David confidently invites God to examine his heart because he has an intimate relationship with God through regular prayer and confession. Daily drawing near to God through honest prayer and confession of sin keeps us “prayed up.” A “prayed up” life is confident in times of crisis and knows God is big enough to handle any situation.

Read Hebrews 10:22.

From what does God cleanse us?

By staying “prayed up” we maintain a pure heart, clean conscience, and growing relationship with the Lord. Therefore, in times of crisis we can confidently declare as David, “I am innocent.”

“Am I really innocent?” Examining the Truth of the Matter

“Though you probe my heart and examine me at night, though you test me, you will find nothing.”

There are times when I fight to the death defending my innocence, never considering the possibility that I am not. The reality is: I am not always innocent. Rushing to defend ourselves, never considering we might be with fault, impedes the Holy Spirit’s work in the matter and our life.

A few years ago my fitness as a parent came under accusations. It was devastating! My heart was shattered. Like David, I cried out to God declaring my innocence and asking for help.

God faithfully helped me through the truthful, yet convicting words of a neighbor. My neighbor spoke truth, in love, pointing out ways my supervision may have been construed as negligent. Though I was “prayed up” and innocent of being an unfit parent, I realized there was room for growth and improvement. God uses times of crisis as growth opportunities. “He has greater purposes for us than to help us avoid pain.” (-Beth Moore)

Read Proverbs 15:31. Read it in the NLT as well if possible.

What is most challenging for you about accepting life-giving rebuke or constructive criticism?

Life-giving truth and constructive criticism may be purposed through God's sovereignty, to bring us in line with His perfect plan. It is crucial to respond to life-giving rebuke in a godly way. In the midst of crisis or accusations, the godly response is two-fold.

First, we ask God to reveal any truth in the criticism. He will heal what He reveals. Our response is to allow Him to complete His work without becoming bitter about the rebuke. If no truth is revealed, ask God to remove the hurt and help you move on. The second part of a godly response is to avoid striking back.

"But I Am Innocent!" Leaving Our Vindication in His Hands

In his prayer, David teaches us not only to ask God for protection amid accusations (verses 8-9), but also for vindication (verse 2). David does not confront his enemy nor run around Jerusalem's hillsides calling his accusers liars, exonerating himself. He completely trusts God to rise up, confront and bring the guilty parties down.

When I've been unjustly accused, my first response was not a godly one. With my temper raging I called my accusers to confront them. Fortunately no one was home. Time allowed me to process the situation and shift the weight of my defense onto God's shoulders.

What is the hardest part of remaining silent when you are falsely accused?

Allowing God to be our Avenger is tough. Our human nature demands an instant and public acquittal. God, however, most often desires to settle matters in a less public manner in His own time. If we rush with our temper flaring to make our innocence known, we may create results with irreversible effects. James 1:3 says, "You know under pressure your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors" (The Message). In the heat of the moment it is hard to display the "finest colors" of our faith."

Read Proverbs 29:11.

What kind of man/woman controls his/her temper?

Oh to be at home among the wise. God is on our side. He is ready to hear troubles. He is faithful to respond. He is just and perfect in the timing of vindication. Our job is to allow Him to shoulder the weight and work on our behalf.

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 18

Author: David

I LOVE songs of praise! I love praising the Lord by singing an old hymn or a contemporary song. My mind raced as I read David's song of praise. I wonder what instruments were played. Was it fast or slow? Exhausted from the battle and a near-death experience (2 Sam. 2:16) David still found the strength to praise the Lord.

There is something mysteriously powerful about praise. In weakness, praise makes us strong. In strength, praise creates joy. Like David, we are warriors. We battle flesh and blood as well as rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph. 6:11). He is praiseworthy for being our Weapon of war, our Rock, Fortress, Shield, and Horn of Salvation.

God Is Our Rock

A rock represents strength and power. In our weakest and most vulnerable moments, God is our source of strength. When we feel defeated, it is His power that brings victory. Rocks are a source of protection and defense as danger threatens. God was the rock in David's sling as he slew Goliath (1 Sam. 17:48-49). He was the rock Moses struck at Horeb (Ex. 17:6), supplying the Israelites' physical needs by providing water. Rocks are solid and will not crumble. Our God is strong and solid, and will not waver when we cast our cares on Him (1 Pet. 1:7).

A rock is solid and unchangeable. What does Hebrews 13:8 tell us about our God?

God Is Our Fortress

Each time I read the word fortress I picture myself standing erect, chest out as if marching into battle, assured of victory, singing, "A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing." A fortress is a place of exceptional security. Doesn't that describe our God perfectly?

We face fierce battles against our enemy, but we also have day-to-day struggles like finances, job security, health care, wayward children, aging parents, and unfulfilled marriages. He is our safe place to run and hide no matter how big or small the battle might be, protecting us from all external danger, injury, and annoyances.

The cities in David's day were fortified by a strong, tall wall guarded day and night by watchmen in towers. The enemy could be seen coming from miles away. Rarely, could a city be attacked by surprise. Those inside the fortress could relax, regroup, and refresh. Inside the fortress of God, when trouble comes we do not have to fear. He is not surprised by trouble. He stands guard day and night so we may have a safe place to relax our bodies, regroup our thoughts, and refresh our spirits.

Read Proverbs 18:10. Write the verse in the space below.

God Is Our Shield

Every warrior needs a shield. The shield, typically held in the left hand, enables the warrior to defend attacks from the front. The soldier must be alert and able to move quickly, looking for swords, lances, and arrows coming from all directions. There are times in our lives when we aren't alert or able to move quickly because trouble, tragedy, and hardship have worn us down. We need our Shield, the Lord of Heaven's Armies (Ps. 24:10), standing in front of us, fighting off the fiery arrows of the enemy (Eph. 6:16).

Read John 16:33.

What assurance does God give us when trouble comes?

God Is Our Horn of Salvation

There was a time my husband and I loved to watch PBR (Professional Bull Riding). The size and power of the bulls intrigued me. I was amazed, however, to see a 2000 pound bull come into the arena virtually hornless.

A bull's horns display its power. The very long and sharp horns can potentially kill a rider and, therefore, must be cropped. Our Lord is the power of our salvation, both eternally and physically. The effectiveness of His power is only cropped by our unbelief and lack of trust in His ability to save and rescue us from our war.

Read Hebrews 11:6.

What does God do for those who believe He exists and earnestly seek Him?

Read Mark 5:36.

What does Jesus say to Jarius concerning the healing of his daughter?

What has cropped your belief and trust in Christ?

God is all that we need in every battle. Like David, our battles teach us who God is.

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 19

Author: David

Our songwriter and poet David reminds us how God declares Himself. David's words eloquently challenge us to see God's majesty in creation, Scripture, and through a right-standing with Him in repentance, surrendering our mind and mouth.

Look Upward: To His Creation (vs.1-6)

A few years ago I noticed my morning quiet time with the Lord was becoming routine and needed new life. Within a few days I felt the overwhelming desire to be outside during my time with Jesus. I knew this was His answer to my dilemma.

Since then, I met with the Lord outside in the cool mornings of early spring until late fall. I love it! I gather my Bible, MP3 player, and devotional, and head outside. Most mornings there's no need to play any music; I simply listen. God's creation plays a symphony of praise that continues all day. His works of art are on display for our pleasure. The music and message can only be heard if we will press life's pause button.

God clearly communicates His message and His majesty through creation. He makes Himself known to everyone through all that He has formed. Scripture tells us the world is without excuse for not recognizing God.

Read Romans 1:20.

What has God made clearly known through creation?

Challenge yourself to press pause.

Look Toward: His Word (vs.7-11)

The Law. Statues. Precepts. Commands. These words fall heavy on one's heart, sounding weighty and burdensome. Our mind conjures up pictures of Old Testament sacrifices and prophets. Let's get an overview of the whole of God's Word.

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

Which part of Scripture is God-breathed?

What is the purpose of *all* Scripture?

What are my feelings toward *all* Scripture?

More on the Law, Statues, Precepts, and Commands

The Mosaic and Ceremonial Law of the Old Testament was cancelled by Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus was the once and for all sacrifice for past, present, and future sins. Christ's sacrifice, however, does not exempt us from obedience. As New Testament believers under the Covenant of Christ, we are accountable for applying and keeping the moral law outlined in Exodus 20 (The Ten Commandments) and for applying what He reveals as we study His Word.

God's ways and commands are anything but burdensome. Psalm 119 expounds on the value of God's Word as well as the benefits of keeping it.

Locate Psalm 119. Answer the following about the benefits of keeping God's Word.

When we walk according to His Word we...

- Verse 1 _____
- Verse 11 _____
- Verse 45 _____
- Verse 54 _____
- Verse 165 _____

God's guidelines give His girls the security they need to live out His plan.

Look Inward: At Ourselves

Looking inward was the last thing I wanted to do as I started following hard after God more than ten years ago. I was certain the circumstances surrounding my unrest were to be blamed on others. Studying the Bible and applying it to my life made me begin to look inward. In searching for the solution to my unrest, the Holy Spirit exposed parts in my life that were not pleasing to God and the cause of my unrest and disorder.

God combines our looking toward His Word and inward at ourselves to shape us into His image. Submitting to the power of His living and active Word has changed my life. What we can't see, God's Word reveals.

Read Hebrews 4:12.

What does God's Word accomplish?

Look upward to creation to see His majesty. Look toward His Word for the freedom for which you long. Look inward at yourself to become more like Him.

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 20

Author: David

David is facing yet another battle. Have you ever felt like David? Another day brings another battle. Maybe your battle is in your home as you wake up and remember that you alone are responsible for the welfare of your child(ren). Your battle may be a terminal disease or chronic illness that robs you of the simple pleasure of walking to the mailbox or driving to get a cup of coffee with a friend. Perhaps your battle is in your mind as you fight the lies that have stolen your self-worth.

David demonstrates the most important battle strategy: start with prayer.

Father, Will You?

Sometimes I forget to whom I am praying. Do you? Perhaps, it will do us good to take a journey down memory lane and remember exactly who we are talking to when we pray.

When we pray, we are talking to the God of Jacob, Yahweh, the covenant keeping God. We pray to the God who created Heaven and Earth (Gen. 1-2). We pray to the God who parted the Red Sea (Ex. 14:21), and the Jordan River (Jos. 3:14-17). We call upon the God who stood with Daniel in a den of lions (Dan. 6); we cry out to the God who kept Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego cool in the flaming furnace (Dan. 3).

He is the God who makes the blind see, the deaf hear, and the lame walk. We pray to the same God to whom our heroes and heroines of the Bible prayed. Suit-up for the day and pray; asking God for help and for victory, just like David.

Ask Him for Help and Support

God sends help and support through “faces and places” we don’t always recognize. It is easy to resist help if we don’t recognize the source. God appoints individuals to help us. I like to call them Jesus with skin. Resisting help and being too proud or stubborn to ask for it, makes the battle or hardship last longer than God intended. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness; it is a sign of strength. Not accepting assistance is a form of pride.

Read 1 Peter 5:5.

What does God oppose? _____

What does He give? _____

Read Psalm 25:9.

What does God do for and give the humble? _____

With grace, and learning God’s way as by-products of humility, let’s stay humble, asking God for help and accepting it, no matter how it is delivered.

What do you find most challenging in asking God for help and victory?

Ask Him to Remember

David had followed the ceremonial tradition of sacrifices and prayers before battle. He was reminding God of his reverence and wanted God to remember his past obedience by blessing his present battle.

It would be easy to read this and think, “Well, I have not been obedient in the past so God will not come to my aid now.” Friend, God does not determine His degree of help based on our past devotion. He is a very present help in times of all trouble (Ps. 46:1.) We know this to be true as we examine the thief on the cross. The thief had done nothing for Christ, yet in those moments beside Jesus, he believed. God came to him in his time of need and saved him (Luke 23:43).

Read Nahum 1:7.

What do we have to do to receive God’s help? _____

Ask Him to Give

The desire of David’s heart is victory in his battle, but ultimately David desires to have what God wants him to have. David asks for his desires, but would willingly exchange his desires for God’s. He is a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam. 13:14) and wants his heart to please God.

At what cost are we willing to exchange our desires for God’s? For example, would we willingly lose the battle, ask our child to leave, resign from the position, or say no to the opportunity of a lifetime in order to save our marriage?

What desire of your heart do you find difficult to surrender to God?

Father, I Will

David starts his prayer by asking, “Will You?” and ends it with “I will.” David is aware of the myth in trusting things such as chariots and horses that will ultimately collapse under the demands of battle. He decides instead to place His trust in a sure thing.

Our God is a sure thing. Trust can be defined as: The Relying Upon a Sure Thing. We can trust Him to respond to our prayers. Can He trust us to trust Him, not our own chariots and horses?

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 21

Author: David

God responded to David's prayer in Psalm 20 by giving him victory. David pens his gratitude in Psalm 21. He gives God credit not only for his victory but also for his strength, his crown, and his majesty. He recognizes all he has is because of God. As David concludes his appreciation, in praise he makes a proclamation: *"For the king trusts in the Lord; through the unfailing love of the Most High he will not be shaken."*

What are your initial thoughts to the idea of "not be shaken?"

The truth of David's proclamation is fundamental to our "not being shaken" in our sea of troubled circumstances and heartaches. It is the origin of our joy and peace when we are enclosed by sadness and disarray. David recognizes his stability, success, and security are not a result of *his* work, but rather of *God's* unfailing love.

The Hebrew transliteration of *unfailing love* is goodness, kindness, and faithfulness. It is through God's goodness, kindness, and faithfulness that we are not, and will not, be shaken. Like David, our stability, success, and security do not have anything to do with our work or our doing *for* the Lord, but rather our trust *in* Him.

Read Psalm 40:4, Proverbs 16:20, and Jeremiah 17:7.
Describe the one who trusts in the Lord.

Read Proverbs 3:3-6.

What is the result of our trust in the Lord?

Dictionary.com defines *trust* as: the reliance on the integrity, strength, ability, surety, etc., of a person or thing; a confident expectation of something; hope.

God's character is extremely reliable. We can place confident hope in His strength and ability to bring about stability, security, and success in our lives. As we have studied, the person who trusts in the Lord is blessed. Sometimes we are "blessed" by the answer no or not now.

As we learn to fully trust in God we will see Him weave every yes, no, not now that He gives, and our failures to obey, with our willingness to walk with Him to make a display of His splendor. We do not always understand His ways, but can always trust His work.

Read Philippians 1:6.

What kind of work is God doing in your life?

Be confident of this truth today.

We have explored at great length God's character trait unfailing love, defined as goodness, kindness, and faithfulness. These three adjectives describe our great God. Paul calls them "fruit" and writes of them, as well as six others, in his letter to the church at Galatia.

Read Galatians 5:22-23. Write the verses in the space below. Circle the fruit you most appreciate right now in your life.

His Spirit

God loves us with perfect love from His perfect Spirit. He lavishes His children with generous doses of each fruit exactly when we need them. The foundation of His generosity is tucked in John's letter. Refresh yourself with this amazing truth.

Turn in your Bible and read aloud John 3:16.

What is the foundation of God's generosity? _____

Our Spirit

Every fruit Paul speaks of pours forth from God's great love for us. When we believe, we receive. We receive the same Spirit that filled David's words with life and passion. We receive the same Spirit Paul writes about in Galatians 5.

Read John 14:16.

How long will this Spirit be with us?

Read 1 John 4:11.

What does God expect us to do in response to His love?

The Holy Spirit makes it possible to carry out what He has commanded. When we love like Christ loved us, the other fruits of His Spirit pour from us as naturally as they poured from Jesus. We will have moments like David to sing of His wondrous ways. We will not be shaken and He will be exalted.

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 22

Author: David

Despair is lonely and frightening. As we walk with David we see despair becoming a familiar place. Each time we find him there we hear his human anguish turn to comfort and confidence in God's ability to lead him out. We can enjoy the same assurance as David. God will lead us out and bring purpose from pain.

Forsaken: Not by God

The sound of despair echoes in David's words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" My guess would be that you have cried out similar words to God. Perhaps the physical agony was not equal to that of the psalmist, but I am quite certain many can relate to the mental and emotional pain.

It is easy to feel God has abandoned us when our hard circumstances continue to prevail and joy evades. Even though we feel like God has given up on us, leaving us alone to manage our hard circumstances single-handedly, He has not. For God to forsake or leave His children, He would have to change His Name.

Read Matthew 1:23.

What is God's Name? What does His Name mean?

Forsake means to leave, give up entirely, or renounce. God cannot forsake His children. Doing so would go against His nature. God would never contradict who He is and compromise His character.

Read 1 John 4:8.

What is the basis of God's nature?

If this does not prove God will not leave or forsake us, He put it in writing, word for word so we would know for sure.

Read Deuteronomy 31:8. Write the verse in the space below. Circle the word never.

We can't always trust our feelings, but we can always trust God's heart. His heart is full of love and purpose. Our feelings are a response to our human nature. They mislead us, and without a transition in thinking, can even lie to us.

David demonstrates a transition of thinking in verse three. After crying out his honest feelings before God we hear a shift in David's thinking. It is as if David suddenly remembers truth. "Yet You are enthroned as the Holy One." This truth begins to set him free to remember more truth. He remains honest with God about his feelings, but once again starts to steady his feelings with the truth about God that he has grown to trust.

Think about it: What truth about God have you grown to trust?

The burden of proof has been made: God will never leave or forsake His children, but sometimes His children forsake each other. The power of Hebrews 13:5, combined with knowledge of God’s great love, provides the security we need when rejection comes at the hand of others.

Forsaken: By Others, Possibly

Life is hard. Life hurts. People disappoint. These are the cold, hard facts. My husband and I are teaching our children this simple lesson of life: people will let you down, but God will not. People say one thing and do another and make promises they do not fulfill. Husbands and wives abandon their marriage. Friends abandon relationships.

In the midst of David musing over mockery, insults, and rejection, he makes a transition in his thinking by remembering something very important about God.

Read Psalm 22:19.

What does David remember?

How does this knowledge bring comfort and security to you?

Knowing God as our Strength and Helper soothes an aching heart, making our troubled times less troubling. But it does not always remove the piercing pain that overwhelms us when we experience rejection from those we love. Our Savior knows full-well the pain rejection can cause and sympathizes with our pain (Luke 17:25). In fact, He offers more than sympathy.

Read Psalm 56:8.

What does God do to show He sees and cares about our sorrow?

We can wear God’s sympathy as a cloak of comfort during the painful times of rejection. Its warmth will provide an unexplainable peace that will enable us to proclaim the praise of verse three, “Yet You are enthroned as the Holy One; You are the praise of [insert your name].”

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 23

Author: David

We meet David in a valley many have walked, the valley of death. Death however is not the only valley life takes us through. We may journey through the valley of despair or destruction. Perhaps we cross the valley of divorce, debt, dependency, distractions, or disease. We do not get to choose our valley, but we can be certain our traveling Companion will provide everything we need for the trip.

Our traveling Companion is David's Companion, the Lord. David gives the Lord a new name, Shepherd. He is our Shepherd and we are His sheep (See John 10:7-15). With our Shepherd's guidance there is no need to want or fear, even when we walk through life's valleys.

We "Shall Not Want"

There could be cause for alarm in a valley. Needs may arise. However, as we learn to stay close to our Shepherd, we discover there is no need to want. Like a shepherd guides his sheep with his staff, God guides us through the person of the Holy Spirit. His Sovereignty and perfect plan for our life provides safety and protection as He uses the rod to protect His sheep. His beautiful creation provides nourishment and refreshment for our physical needs.

Read John 10:3-4.

The Shepherd provides. What is the responsibility of the sheep?

Every minute we spend with our Shepherd is valuable. Time teaches us to recognize, listen to, and obey God's voice. As we do so, we begin to "want not" and live in the freedom of God's provision.

Read Philippians 4:19.

What will the Lord, our Shepherd, provide?

We shall not want according to His glorious riches, not our selfish desires. As a shepherd deeply loves his sheep, so our Good Shepherd loves us. He loves us so much His provision includes everything we need, even if what we need is not what we want or causes us pain.

"Makes Me Lie Down"

I do not like to be "made" to do something, never have. In an earlier lesson I shared not liking rules or being told what to do. My mule-headedness is genetic, both paternally and maternally.

In spending time with my Shepherd and learning to recognize His voice, I have discovered "Yes Sir" is the best response. With the stubborn genetic make-up flowing through my veins, this lesson did not come without pain. Pain is a great teacher.

It is through pain sheep learn to stay with their shepherd. Sheep are prone to wander. Sometimes a sheep refuses to return when the shepherd calls, forcing the shepherd to gently break his leg to teach him to stay close.

With love and care the shepherd splints the broken leg, then carries the sheep to a new and safe place of pasture. This hurts the shepherd because he loves the sheep, but he knows the valuable lessons pain teaches. Wounded, the sheep has no other choice but to stay close to the shepherd, to go only where he leads, and trust him completely for every need.

Like sheep, we are prone to wonder. Our adventurous nature can lead us to dangerous places and cause us to make detrimental choices. Sometimes we don't see the danger, but our Shepherd does. He calls us by name: sometimes we return, sometimes we refuse. In love, He allows pain to touch us in order to teach us.

Read Hebrews 12:6.

Who does the Lord discipline?

He lovingly tends to our wounds and carries us to new, safe, and quiet places. He knows that when wounded, we will stay close to Him, going where He leads, completely trusting Him to supply all our needs.

“Fear No Evil”

Wolves prowl around low to the ground hoping to capture their prey without warning. A good shepherd is alert, carries a rod and staff, and sleeps at the gate to protect his flock from evil. Though we have an enemy (1 Pt. 5:8), with God as our Good Shepherd alert at the gate of our heart, we have nothing to fear.

Read Isaiah 41:10.

What does God do for those who are tempted to fear?

Friends, there is no need to fear. Our Good Shepherd provides so we shall not want and His love allows pain to teach us. He stands by the gate ready to strike evil with His rod and staff. We can count on His goodness and mercy to follow us all the days of our lives.

Personal Reflection and Application. Read John 10:1-18.

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 24

Author: David

Entering the Temple, choirs and soloists would sing this commemorative song to remember the Ark of the Covenant—the symbol of God and His presence. David reminds us of something well worth remembering and he belts it out in verse one: nothing belongs to us.

“The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.”

Everything Means Everything

At the tender age of 9, my daddy taught me the truth of Psalm 24:1, not by word but by deed. He was at the kitchen table, in his normal Saturday night seat, filling out our tithing envelopes for church. He asked me for my offering of 25¢. You see, I had done some babysitting for the Dowling family Friday night and was paid \$2.50. The Lord’s share was 25¢. Tithing was what my dad and mom did. I did not understand why I had to tithe. After all, I was just a kid and it was only a quarter.

My daddy lovingly explained all we have is God’s and He allows us to keep all but 10%. My head heard him and obeyed. My heart did not quite comprehend this command and questioned. Needless to say, I tithed 25¢ from that Friday night’s job and every babysitting job thereafter, continuing to give to the Lord as He continues to give to me. I tithe because now my head and heart get it: everything is God’s!

Read Colossians 1:16. Write the verse in the space below. Circle the words “by him” and “for him.”

The truths in Psalm 24:1 and Colossians 1:16 are boundary lines for our protection from the lies our culture tells about money and possessions.

Our culture has bought the lie: we are self-sufficient. We have logically reasoned: we do the work, therefore the money and all that comes from the money belong to us. Operating within the logic of this thinking can lead to self-destruction, succumbing to the “want more” mentality.

Greed is the excessive desire for wealth or possessions. This wrong pattern of thinking drives our culture to want greater power, higher position, and more possessions. Living within the boundaries God sets provides the victim of the “want mores” with the power to defeat greed and experience prosperity God’s way.

Read Proverbs 28:25.

Who will prosper?

The Hebrew transliteration of the word prosper is to grow fat, become fat, successful.

Prosperity God's way is the only way I would welcome a "weight" problem. Let's ponder that thought.

Getting Fat

Women get fidgety and tight lipped when the topic of weight is discussed. I don't know a woman alive who welcomes and entertains the idea of getting fat. Likewise, I don't know a woman alive who does not welcome and entertain the prosperity of God in her life. God sure knows how to use words, doesn't He?

"A greedy man stirs up dissension, but he who trusts in the Lord will prosper."
(Pr. 28:25)

Our prosperity starts with trusting God and pursuing the opposite of greed: generosity. God gave very clear instructions when speaking to His people about being tightfisted and hardhearted in the treatment of people in need.

Read Deuteronomy 15:10.

How does God respond to our generosity?

How does God expect us to give?

Being generous had never been something I thought much about until last year. Don't get me wrong, I donated clothes, cooked meals, and did favors for friends. But last year God challenged me with a verse from the New Living Translation. "I want you to excel also in this gracious act of giving" (2 Corinthians 8:7b). Paul challenged the church of Corinth and God challenged me.

As I started to pray and apply this verse to my daily decisions, I began to see giving as more than contributing to the community clothes closet, cooking meals, and acts of kindness for friends. It is cheerfully, liberally, and unselfishly, giving in unexpected ways to the unexpected.

When we exhaust ourselves and our resources for the cause of someone who does not expect, we get fat. We become portly with the prosperity of God's character and love. The angle of life's lens becomes wider and the focus clearer. We love deeper, give with great generosity, and see needs we never noticed before.

Read Proverbs 11:25.

What do you think is the meaning of this verse?

If everything is His, shouldn't we be channels of His generosity?

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 25

Author: David

“Who, then, is the man who fears the Lord?” Psalm 25:12

I love when God directly answers a question, don't you? There is no investigation or deductive reasoning skills needed. In black and white, David asks a question and provides the answer for future generations to know and understand.

David has experienced firsthand, from the pasture to the palace, the benefits of having reverence for God. God has directed David, telling him where and when to go (v12). In faithfully following God's direction, David prospered (v13), as well as earned the privilege of having God confide in him (v4).

The sum total of these benefits (direction, prosperity, and secret sharing) is a confident faith. And indeed, David writes Psalm 25 expressing his confident faith. By following David's example, becoming a “man” who fears the Lord, God can transform wavering unbelief to confident faith.

Confident Faith in Waiting

By nature I am pessimistic. In my “BJ” days (before Jesus) the glass was always “half empty” and waiting was never “a good thing.” I could not save money because there was always something I “just had to have.” Opportunities were missed because I “just had to be first.” The list could go on, but I will spare you.

This pessimistic way of thinking carried over into my relationship with the Lord. However, my growing faith can now be confident in waiting on God and has taught me not to sacrifice the future for the immediate. When we succumb to the pressure of the immediate, we often end up struggling, suffering heartache we weren't meant to endure. The cost of missing God's best is not worth the temporary pleasures the immediate offers.

Consider all the tender God-moments David would have missed had he run directly to the throne. Confident faith taught him to wait and to wait well. Confident faith has hope in the future because of God's past faithfulness. Such hope is found when we fix our minds on truths that help us wait, and like David, wait well.

Read Isaiah 55:8-9.

What can confident faith learn about God's plans?

Read Isaiah 64:4.

On whose behalf does God act?

Confident faith escorts us from our pasture to our palace with expected hope, even if our journey requires brief stops along the way.

Confident Faith in Mercy and Love

After meeting up with my childhood friends on a beach-get-away, the part of my memory bank I thought was permanently closed was reopened. Memories of past sins, profane behavior, and a plethora of other unkind acts filled my mind. Like David, the weight of remembering was too much to bear. When I confessed, He forgave. God emptied His memory bank and in confident faith I emptied mine.

We can have confident faith in God's mercy and love. His love covers all our sin (1 John 1:7). He deposits mercy in His memory bank, replacing our transgression with forgiveness.

Read 1 John 1:9.

What is God's response to our confession?

Confident Faith in Instruction

Trusting God's instructions as guidelines for life has been the most challenging part of my walk with the Lord. For years, God's ways just did not make sense to me; they went against my natural bend. For instance, how do the last become first? (Luke 13:30) How is it possible to inherit the earth by demonstrating meekness and why should I pray for my enemies? (Matt. 5:5, 44) Oh, and don't even get me started on the subject of wives submitting to their own husbands! (Eph. 5:22)

Now, after much time and study, like David, I have full confidence in God's instructions and take every measure to ensure I follow His leading. Do all His instructions make sense? No. However, my confident faith is built in following them whether they make sense or not.

Confident Faith in Protection

David's confident faith grew as He experienced God's protection and rescue. The One we call God, the One to whom we pray, is the same God who faithfully rescued and protected David. He sent His Son to rescue us from our past sin, as well as our present trouble.

Read Galatians 1:4.

Besides sin, from what did God come to rescue us?

Think about it: Which area is your confident faith weakest? Ask God to help you make it strong.

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 26

Author: David

David's life is proof positive that walking in obedience to God's plan does not ensure a trouble-free life. We can, however, be assured of this: life with God is an adventure full of exciting and very unusual experiences. Unlike some adventures, which have uncertain outcomes, our adventures with God have one certain outcome: to bring us closer to Him. With each yes, we can expect to become more like Him and gain a greater understanding of our purpose. Adventures with God can be prematurely shortened and profoundly spoiled when we allow obstacles to detour them.

Obstacle 1: Wavering Faith

Every great adventure has a great leader; a take charge person who confidently pilots the path. A great leader stays the course, never giving followers any reason to doubt his/her ability to lead.

Doubt is deadly to our faith, as deadly as the serpent that slithers on the path of our adventure. Our enemy cannot steal our salvation, but he can cause us to doubt the security of our Savior. As the author of doubt, Satan writes uncertain scripts we replay again and again in our minds. Our adversary suggests words like: "I told you God could not change this. You are a mess and there is no help for you. He can't be trusted to keep you safe." The scripts spool through our mind causing us to stumble on the obstacle of wavering faith.

Read Psalm 26:3.

How did David avoid obstacle 1?

Truth is the only weapon strong enough to defeat the lies Satan whispers that cause our adventure to temporarily detour. When we know the truth, the truth sets us free (John 8:32). *Know* in the original Greek means to come to realize through personal experience. Our faith will not waver when it is built on the learning, application, and experience of God's truth in our lives. This experienced truth can then be used to defeat Satan's whispers.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:5.

How is it possible to defeat the whispers of the enemy?

What whispers do you hear? With what truth will you silence them?

Has your adventure been temporarily detoured? Spend some time in prayer today, getting back on track following your great Leader. If you are not experiencing a detour, spend time with your great Leader, praising Him for His awesome leadership.

Obstacle 2: Wrong Company

There was a time when my need to be around people was stronger than my ability to ignore ungodly behaviors. In joining my friends to “hang out,” I also “joined in” behaviors not pleasing to God. It was easy to murder the innocent with my words and steal reputations by repeating things I heard. My adventure took a detour each time I kept wrong company and came to a standstill until I dealt with my sin.

In my standstill, the Lord helped me gain the strength and confidence to hurdle over the obstacle of wrong company. Over time there were fewer opportunities to “hang out.” As my adventure resumed, God faithfully led me to right company.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:33.

What is the result of bad company?

Has your adventure been detoured by obstacle number 2? Spend some time with the Lord discussing how to restart your adventure.

Obstacle 3: Worthless Worship

Our adventure with God can be sidetracked when the privilege to worship God is forgotten. Making worship an object, instead of making God the object of our worship, is an easy obstacle to stumble over. David teaches us to approach the altar of the Lord with clean hands, a pure heart, and loudly proclaiming His good deeds. He reminds us to love the place where His glory dwells (v8).

Read Romans 12:1-2.

Describe what worship involves.

How have you stumbled on the obstacle of worthless worship?

Our Leader longs to truly lead us on our adventure, helping us avoid all obstacles. Our obedience and sacrifice will make our adventure of faith great and obstacle free.

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

We have witnessed and studied David's unwavering faith. A surprising by-product of his unwavering faith is his unwavering confidence.

Unwavering confidence in God is not something we pray to have, then one day wake up to claim. This kind of confidence is developed through our obedience to God and His faithfulness to us. Like David, our faith and confidence increase as we believe in and rely on His ability to deliver us from or carry us through life's difficult circumstances. Each time we witness His faithfulness our confidence tank fills. Our tank remains full because of His light, presence, protection, and provision.

Filling Our Confidence Tank with God's Light

My children habitually misplace things like iPods, DSI games, and glasses. We discovered a verse to pray that brings light to these stressful and frustrating times. This truth has filled my confidence tank in both spiritual and non-spiritual matters.

Read 1 Corinthians 4:5.

What does God's light do for that which is in the dark?

The light of God illumines all things—material objects—as well as our secret motives and undisclosed thoughts. What we hide from the light has the propensity to gain power over us, keeping us from living in freedom. When living in the dark becomes a way of life, fear fills our tank rather than the confidence that accompanies the light of God's plan. God's plan is for His children to walk in the freedom of light, not the darkness of failure, flaws, and fear.

Read John 8:12.

What does Jesus promise anyone who believes?

Filling Our Confidence Tank with God's Presence

On the run for most of his life, David came to desire one thing. Though anointed king and promised the throne, the one thing David desired most was to be in the presence of God, in His Temple gazing at His beauty.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are God's dwelling place, His Temple. He is with us and we are with Him at all times. The awesomeness of this reality should fill our confidence tank to overflowing. In His presence, our confidence builds as we begin to know God personally as the lifter of our head, the safety high above our trouble, and the protection from our enemy.

Read Psalm 84:10.

What does the psalmist say about being in the courts (presence) of the Lord? Phrase it in your own words.

Filling Our Confidence Tank with God’s Protection

Unfortunately, we did not all grow up on Pine Lane having Ward Cleaver as a father. Like David, you may have experienced some form of rejection by your father and find it difficult to trust God. David pressed through his trust issues by allowing God into his heart to prove He could be trusted.

I grew up on Elsinore Place in a family as close to the Cleavers as you could imagine. My dad was a great guardian of our home financially, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Yet, no matter how safe and loved I felt, there were times when he let me down. The good news is, even if our earthly fathers have let us down, our Heavenly Father never will.

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:3. Write the verse in the space below.

How is the Lord faithful to His children? Circle the action words in the verse.

Filling Our Confidence Tank with God’s Provision

David says he sees the goodness of the Lord. The King James Version expresses David’s words as, “I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.” Our world has become greedy and gluttonous. We believe we need more instead of believing what we see is good. The simple and basic provisions of life are God’s goodness. The fairness and beauty of God is goodness. And yes, prosperity is His goodness.

The “keeping up with the Joneses” attitude turns our eyes to what others have instead of being appreciative of what God has given us. It leaves us covered in debt, not confident of His provision.

Read 1 Timothy 6:17.

What does God say about wealth?

What does He do for our enjoyment?

Our Heavenly Daddy is faithful and longs to fill our confidence tank to the brim so His goodness will spill over onto all of those we see each day.

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 28

Author: David

David is once again crying out to God, repeating what he has prayed in other prayers: vindication, justice, and punishment for his enemies. However, one line makes this prayer different from those with similar tones. “For *if* You remain silent, I will be like those who have gone down to the pit.” David teaches us that showing vulnerability in a moment of pain and suffering does not mean wavering faith and confidence. It means we are human and that we can be real with God when we pray.

The Pending Prayer

“The value of consistent prayer is not that He will hear us, but that we will hear Him.”
-William McGill

Have you prayed for something for what seemed like an eternity only to feel God was not listening? God’s silence is probably one of the most perplexing things about prayer. When we don’t receive an answer, we tend to ask more questions trying to determine the reason for God’s silence. The prophet Isaiah gives us insight into God’s silence.

Read Isaiah 59:1-2.

What will cause God not to hear?

Not only does sin keep God from hearing us, but it also separates us from Him. The canyon of silence grows with each passing day of unconfessed sin. Confession does not guarantee an answer to our prayer. Confession reopens the lines of communication with God. Answered prayer is a mystery we may not solve this side of Heaven. One thing is for certain, “The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with” (Js. 5:16 The Message). Our part in prayer is to live right with God so our prayers are a force to be reckoned with.

The Purpose of Prayer

“Prayer draws us near to our own souls.”
-Herman Melville

About ten years ago life got hard. Nothing I did seemed to make things better. I decided to try the “prayer thing” and trust God to fix those who were causing my problems instead of trying to fix them myself. As I prayed, I began to draw near to my soul, seeing clearly the one who really needed to be fixed was me. The purpose of prayer is not to get what we want, but to become who God wants us to be. This revelation will change our prayer life as we learn to become a person our soul wants to be near, reflecting the image of our Creator.

Read Genesis 1:27.

Write the scripture replacing “man” and “him” with your name.

Waiting and understanding prayer’s real purpose drives us to a new position of prayer. As we expose our humanity and emotion to God, we recognize the real Communicator of our prayers is the Holy Spirit.

The Posture of Prayer

“Practical prayer is harder on the soles of your shoes than on the knees of your trousers.” ~Austin O'Malley

“Let’s take our places on our faces” was the prayer challenge Bible teacher Beth Moore presented her audience at an event I attended a few years back. As I accepted the challenge, I wondered how my physical position could change my prayer life. It is impossible to measure the effect the posture had on my prayers, but I can tell how much this new posture deeply changed me.

Kneeling and/or lifting hands to the Most Holy Place (22) offers the opportunity to applaud, acknowledge, and respect God’s leadership. He is more inclined to speak and share secrets with those who humbly position themselves to listen. God lifts the head of (Js. 4:10) and gives grace to the humble (Js. 4:6).

Read James 4:6.

What is God’s response to the proud?

There is nothing mystical about the act of kneeling. In fact, God looks upon our hearts, not our physical stance. For some, physical limitations forbid them from kneeling to pray. I’m so glad a humble heart is just as beautiful and submissive to the Lord as a bent knee.

The Path of Prayer

“When you pray, rather let your heart be without words than your words without heart.” ~John Bunyan

The scans don’t come back clear. He leaves anyway. She continues to abuse her body. At times, life presents cruel and harsh circumstances. We know prayer will make a difference, but wonder what to pray and often go to God simply without words.

Our prayers follow a path from our heart, mind, and lips to the Holy Spirit who communicates to God the spirit of our words. When a heart that is right with God is combined with the power of the Holy Spirit, our prayers cannot be messed up or misinterpreted.

Read Romans 8:26-27.

What does the Holy Spirit help us pray?

“No one is a firmer believer in the power of prayer than the devil; not that he practices it, but he suffers from it.” ~Guy H. King

Let’s make our enemy suffer!!!

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 29

Author: David

David is ascribing glory to Yahweh, the covenant keeping God. His life is evidence of his trust in a God who fulfills His promises. David fully trusts God and we can, too! Before, during, and after the "storms of life," we can ascribe glory to the LORD because He sits on His throne, is King forever, gives strength, and blesses His people.

The LORD Sits Enthroned

The mighty waters of life's storms will never rise high enough to bring down the LORD's seat of authority. He has an excellent panoramic view of everything concerning all His children. This view enables Him to see an approaching storm long before it reaches us. His sovereignty either permits the storm to blow toward us or prevents it from coming near us. There is no need to fear the storm because it is under His authority.

Read Matthew 8:27.

How great is the Lord's authority during a storm?

From His throne, God purposes each storm to shape us into His image. He teaches us in the turbulence and asserts His lessons throughout the aftermath. God draws on the strength of the storm to slow us down so we can clearly hear His voice above the rumble.

Read Job 40:6.

From where did the LORD speak to Job?

Reflect upon a time God spoke to you through a storm. How did He purpose the storm in your life? Ascribe glory to Him for what He has done for you.

The LORD is King Forever

Storms may arise at the hand of another person. Bankruptcy, the disillusion of marriage, terminal and chronic illnesses, and death are examples of storms that uproot our lives causing mass destruction. As we walk amid the devastation it might appear God momentarily stepped down from His throne. Take heart, His throne will never be unoccupied!

From His panoramic view, God sees the storm and its destruction as well as the calm that follows. With complete faith we can respond to the ruins caused by the storms with the truth found in Psalm 102:12 (NLT).

"But the LORD is still on His throne and no matter what, will always be King."

- Are you facing ruins from storms? *The Lord is still on His throne!*
- Is the turbulence of your storm overwhelming? *The Lord is still on His Throne!*
- Has His sovereignty redirected you from the storm? *The Lord is still on His Throne!*

Ascribe to God the glory due Him!!!

The LORD Gives Strength

Any storm, violent or nonviolent, leaves us wondering how the damage will ever be repaired. Our Clean-up Crew is Jesus and God, Creator of the world. They are well trained in catastrophe clean-up. In the aftermath, when we are at our weakest, their power rests upon us making us strong (1 Cor. 12:9). We do not have to fear or be dismayed as we survey the magnitude of the disaster. God is strong enough to help us clean up while holding us with His righteous right hand (Is. 41:10).

Read Isaiah 40:29.

Write the verse in the space below. Circle the words increases and power. This is a great truth to memorize.

The LORD Blesses His People with Peace

Peace during and after our storms is only possible through a relationship with Jesus. Well, real peace that is. Real peace can look at the wreckage and see hope. Among the midst of the debris, real hope can look at the future and smile. This peace is supernatural. It is not anything the world can manufacture. This peace causes those without a relationship with Jesus to ask, "How could this storm not have caused her/him to crumble?" The LORD blesses His people with a peace that helps us stand firm forever, no matter what the circumstances.

Read Proverbs 10:25. Write the verse in the space below.

God is creative and always wants to do new things in the lives of children. Sometimes the new thing involves a storm to wipe the old to make way for the new.

Read Isaiah 43:19.

"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland."

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 30

Author: David

King David had done something to make the Lord angry. Yes, David, a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14), angered the Lord. This thought astounds *and* assures me at the same time. If one of the greatest kings and warriors could anger God and still be used in a powerful way for Kingdom advancement, so can I.

There are more than six references in the Bible that cite God's slow approach to anger. As one who angers God, this truth comforts my spirit and makes my heart smile. But I don't want to take advantage of God's patience. Just because He's slow to get angry, doesn't mean He won't become angry. How? Well, we provoke God by doing things He does not like. This fact does not comfort my spirit or make me smile.

We could get specific about what God does not like, but every reason for provoking the Lord's anger can be placed in one of two categories: devotion to another god or direct disobedience.

Devotion to Another god

Idolatry is anything that pulls our devotion and adoration away from God. Possessions, position, and power can be instrumental in doing this. At the core of the "3 Ps" we find the god, *Myself*. We want more stuff. We desire a better position, whether it is head of the PTA or CEO of a company. We long for power, to be in charge of the community recreational ball league or the head of a ministry at church. Trying to serve God and self invites confusion, chaos, and controversy.

Read Jeremiah 44:8 and Matthew 6:24.

What other results follow devotion to another god?

When we intentionally or unintentionally devote ourselves to another god, we fall into such devotion the sting of provoking God's anger will be felt. God will not remove His watchful eye or provision from His children, but will momentarily remove favor and blessing. Like the Israelites, God may bring about a period of wandering (uncertainty), famine (spiritual dryness), defeat (loss), or captivity (bound to sin's power), in order to bring us to repentance and reconciliation

Wandering: The Israelites' failure to obey God and conquer the Promised Land resulted in 40 years of wilderness wandering (Num. 32:13).

Famine: The Lord promises to withhold rain if the Israelites worship and bow down to other gods (Deut. 11:17).

Defeat: The Lord tells the Israelites that defeat will be a result of disobedience (Deut. 28:25).

Captivity: After years of extending grace for their disobedience and idolatry, God allowed the Israelites to be taken captive for 70 years (Jer. 52:28-30).

After the moment of His anger has passed, our wailing turns to dancing. He gives us a new outfit to wear at the celebration, a garment of joy. Our heart will not be able to keep silent (Ps. 30:11-12).

Direct Disobedience

When God was teaching me the importance of obeying, He did so through a verse I had read time and time again.

Read John 14:15. Write it in the space below. Circle the first word.

Perhaps like me you read this verse and thought, “Well, duh. Of course I love You, Lord.” John’s words, like many familiar scriptures, are easy to gloss over. However, they are the foundation of our obedience or lack thereof. Obeying Him will not be a priority until we can truly say we love Him. Moreover, if we are not obeying God, then we are provoking Him. Scary thought, isn’t it?

Love is the Greek word, *agapao* (ag-ap-ah'-o). This love means we unconditionally and actively do what the Lord prefers. He supplies the power and direction through the Holy Spirit. I love this about God! He supplies all that it takes to accomplish all that He asks.

Read 1 John 5:3.

What does John tell us about God’s commands?

Obedience without love is legalism. This being true, how do we truly love God? Not to shock anyone, but I wasn’t sure I loved God that much. About 10 years ago I began to pray five words that changed my life: “Lord, help me love You.” It may seem like an elementary prayer, but at the time it was all I had. As months went by, my desire to obey matured and I realized my love for Him was growing. Obeying God became something I *wanted* to do instead of something I *had* to do. Love defeats legalism.

Read John 14:21, 23.

What is God’s response to the loving obedience of His children?

Read Deuteronomy 6:5. As we concentrate on loving the Lord this way, obedience will become second nature. Instead of provoking Him, we will please Him. A love like this will truly change your life. Just ask Him to help you love Him. He helped me. He will help you.

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 31

Author: David

David is in physical and mental trouble. My heart ached as I read his symptoms. My thoughts raced to friends who suffer physical and mental affliction and the anxiety and sorrow that accompany them. I remembered times my own eyes grew weak with sorrow. Have you been there? Are you experiencing distress now?

Unlike David who begins his prayer of distress with praise, my “suffering prayers” usually play Pity Party in D minor. Through his prayer, David resolved to completely trust and place his hope in the Lord. His resolution states, “Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O LORD, the God of Truth.”

Read Luke 23:46.

Who else resolved to completely trust God during physical and mental affliction?

Jesus and David put God in charge of their spirits. Essentially, they told God, “I am at the end of myself. Whether You deliver me out of this or through this, You are the God of Truth.” Their example teaches us a basic principle of Distress Relief 101: commit our spirit to the God of Truth.

About Affliction

As we commit our spirit to the God of Truth we need to be ready to face the truth He reveals. Clearly David is suffering. Misery recognizes and relates to misery. Maybe like David, your anguish has consumed you for years and physically you ache. The roots of affliction run deep. Following the root to identify the source is the first step to healing and wholeness.

Comfort from Confession

David used the word *affliction* in verse 10. This is the Hebrew word `avon, meaning guilt or punishment of iniquity; consequence of or punishment for iniquity. The God of Truth reveals to David that his affliction is the direct result of sin. It is important to say, all afflictions are not consequences of sin; but all sin, if not confessed, can result in afflictions.

Read 1 John 1:9.

In addition to forgiveness, what else is God faithful to do when we confess?

Physical and mental conditions can illustrate the power of unconfessed sin. Confession shows God’s power to forgive and brings relief to our suffering. His relief purifies and restores our spirit.

Through confession our sins are forgiven, but our consequences are not forgotten and we have to walk them out. Thankfully, God blankets us with the comfort of His forgiveness. The purification of His comfort enables us to stand upright to face our consequences. This wonderfully mysterious phenomenon is experienced when we face the truth from the God of Truth.

(Note: Distress, afflictions, and their symptoms are not black and white. If you have chronic physical and mental symptoms, please seek medical and professional attention.)

My family loves to watch our favorite movies over and over. Some movies we can quote word for word. We often quote something Mr. Han says to Dre in Karate Kid (2009), “Your focus needs focus.” In seasons of distress and affliction it is easy to focus on our trouble rather than truth.

Read Hebrews 12:2.

Where should we focus our gaze? Why?

Comfort from Truth

After we are purified and comforted through confession, we can stand tall to face our consequences. Reaping what we sow can be toiling. Our enemy will try to weaken us by whispering lies. When the tears blur our eyes we must “focus our focus” by filling ourselves with the life that comes from God’s Truth. There is power when we fix our mind on Truth rather than trouble.

Read Philippians 4:8.

How do we silence the lies?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:18.

How does this truth help us “focus our focus?”

Think Truth: our afflictions are not eternal. Thinking truth is not magic, it is power. Whether the source of affliction is unconfessed sin, grief, a mental disorder, job loss, infidelity, or addictions, thinking truth provides the power to live beyond the affliction.

About the Darkness

Distress is a dark place until it is exposed to the light of truth. It’s necessary and good to share our distress, but it’s easy to wear out our support system of family and friends. Like David, we can feel forgotten by those who care about us when they are tired, busy or have their own concerns to deal with. God calls us to carry each other’s burdens (Gal. 6:2), but not become a burden to those willing to share our load. Meeting God in the darkness of distress and handing Him the bulk of the load (Matt. 11:28) frees so we don’t tax our support system and send them running.

Life with afflictions is painful. We must identify the source. Keep our gaze fixed on Him. Let Him carry the load. In doing so, we can rest assured that He is faithful to preserve the faithful. (v23)

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 32

Author: David

David proclaims we are blessed or happy when our sins are forgiven. Unconfessed sin has the opposite effect. It paralyzes the heart, rendering us unable to freely give and receive love or experience true joy and blessedness. Personally, I want to stand in the line for some happy. How about you?

David uses the word forgiven (past tense), which suggests confession. Our blessed state depends on getting our heart right with God through repentance of our sin. God stands ready to erase our sins as if they never happened (Isaiah 43:25). But do we stand ready to confess? Moreover, do we stand ready to receive His forgiveness?

Paralyzed: The Unconfessed Heart

David chose to suffer in silence, keeping his sin to himself. As his health failed, he felt the weight of conviction. This weight is removed through confession, injecting happiness straight into the heart. Confession is not *telling* God we sinned (He already knows). Confession is *acknowledging* our sin to God. David confessed and was blessed. His confession freed him of conviction and reopened communication with the Lord.

Read Isaiah 59:2.

What effect does sin have on our relationship with God?

Sin *separates* our heart from God's heart. Confession *reconciles* our heart with God's. But who reconciles *our* heart with *our* heart?

Paralyzed: The Unaccepting Heart

As I type the word *unaccepting*, my spell check inserts that red squiggly line that warns me this word is not in the dictionary. I'm choosing to ignore it though; every now and then I have to make up a word to fit my point. This is one of those times. You see, there are times my heart is unaccepting of His grace. It is one thing to humble ourselves and ask God to forgive our sin, but quite another to accept the forgiveness He freely gives.

Our life cannot fully take pleasure in blessedness (happiness) if we reconcile with God's heart but not with our own. The enemy, Satan, likes nothing better than to see God's girls living in shame, shackled by regret. Jesus' sacrifice removed the power of sin. An unaccepting heart of this truth gives Satan power to paralyze our blessedness.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Those who have faith through Jesus Christ are _____.

Read Romans 6:14.

Therefore because of God's grace, sin shall not _____ God's girls.

The enemy only has the power we give him. Friends, it is time to take the power back. Tell God today, "*By faith I accept Your forgiveness and refuse to be a slave to forgiven sin. Today, I confess. I am blessed. I move on! Thank You Lord.*"

Read John 8:36.

What are you? _____ How do you know?

There is a third cause of a paralyzed heart: the unforgiving heart. If you feel resistant to the very word “forgive,” and have a sudden urge to stop reading, may I ask you to please stick with me for this next section? Let’s walk through this together. I know it can be hard and totally agree with C.S. Lewis, “Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive.”

Paralyzed: The Unforgiving Heart

You don’t know what she did. He left me for someone half his age and destroyed our family. She chose to drink and drive and we lost our son. They cheated our family out of thousands of dollars causing us to lose our home. And the list goes on. “Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive.”

2 Corinthians 5:18-19.

To what ministry are we called? Why?

God reconciled Himself with us through the sacrifice of His only son Jesus. Therefore, our reconciliation with others is a responsibility, not an option. To reconcile means to bring into agreement or harmony. The harmony reconciliation brings is not as much for the offender as it is for the offended. Just as Satan holds power over us when we don’t accept God’s forgiveness of our sin, he also holds power over us when we refuse to offer forgiveness.

Is it easy? No. And I don’t know anyone who has been devastated by a painful, life-altering experience who would say it is. When I was falsely accused of being an unfit mother, the only way I could face my offenders (who were my neighbors) was to forgive them each time I left my driveway and each time I turned on my street to return home. Did this restore my harmony with them? Eventually. But it flooded my heart immediately.

Read Colossians 3:13. Write it in the space provided.

Bearing with those who offend us often seems impossible. If we stood alone in the struggle, it would be. But we are not alone.

Read Matthew 19:26.

Is reconciliation possible? Why?

Our heart is upright and able to rejoice when the reality of reconciliation with God, ourselves, and our offender is realized. Living this reality transforms a heart from paralyzed to peaceful.

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 33

Author: Anonymous, most likely David

Though all commentaries do not credit him, this song of praise written for our trustworthy Creator and Deliverer was most likely penned by David. The song begins the same way Psalm 32 ends, referring to the upright. It is as though the two are one continuous song. The upright are glad and sing joyfully to Yahweh, the covenant keeping God. The upright know God to be faithful and recognize the LORD's word, work, and ways.

His Word

“For the word of the LORD is right and true; He is faithful in all He does.”

Yashar (yaw-shawr) is the Hebrew word for right and true. Have you ever thought, “It might be right and true, but I don't understand it?” Those were my thoughts until I discovered a simple truth tucked in the book of Deuteronomy.

Read Deuteronomy 29:29.

What are we responsible for understanding and obeying?

It is easy to get distracted with things we do not understand in the Bible. When I encounter something I have a question about, to help me understand without being overwhelmed, I ask God to reveal one truth in the passage I'm studying. I like to call this my one truth nugget. If I desire further explanation I dig into my commentaries and Bible dictionaries.

When a scripture passage confuses me, I recall the truth of Deuteronomy 29:29 and ask God to show me my nugget. At this point it is out of my hands. He reveals what He wants me to know, and the rest? Well, He will tell me about it later. The application of this right and true passage has enabled me to push through the challenging passages I do not understand to live out all that I do understand.

The Word is *ya'shar*, right and true. The Word is also alive and active. It is always current, always teaching, and always applicable.

Read Hebrews 4:12.

How is the Word of the Lord described? What does it do?

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

How does God use His Word in our life?

How has today's lesson challenged or changed your thoughts concerning His Word?

His Work

Have you ever been in a helpless situation and within moments help arrived? When this happens you are experiencing God's work in your life.

Just recently, on the way out of town, my husband noticed a warning light on his car's dashboard had come on. At the same time, our mechanic, who happened to be behind my husband at a stop light, honked his horn to get my husband's attention. Within a couple of hours my husband was safely back on the road, with a new alternator installed by a responsible and honest mechanic. My husband experienced God's work.

God's work can be seen in the complex, like creation, as well as the simple, like meeting a need only you and God know you have. His work is no less miraculous today as it was when He set up and deposed kings, parted waters, or walked the streets of Jerusalem in the person of Jesus, healing the sick and raising the dead.

Read John 5:17.

When is God at work?

He is always at work. We can personally experience God's work and have the privilege of being part of His work in another's life. If we are not experiencing His work, it does not mean He is not working. To experience His work, we may have to say no to movies with friends in order to serve dinner at the homeless shelter, or refrain from purchasing something we want so we can help someone else buy something they need. Once we taste the thrill of experiencing God's work we will not be able to sit on the sidelines of His story ever again.

His Way

God makes His plans known and accomplishes them. To the patriarch Abram, He appeared in a vision. He made His way known to Moses through a burning bush. To Balaam, He spoke through a donkey. He appoints and dismisses leaders. He strengthens and weakens armies. God has a way for me and a way for you. His way is dependable and trustworthy. It is for our good, offering a future full of hope if we seek Him with all our heart (Jer. 29:11-13).

Read Psalm 33:11.

How long will God's plan stand firm? _____

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 34

Author: David

After running from Saul, acting like a mad-man, and escaping death, David pens Psalm 34. The LORD's praise is on his lips. His soul boasts and rejoices. He has experienced the LORD's goodness and wants everyone to taste it and see it. David has been delivered *from* all his fears *by* the God he fears.

No Fear

In previous lessons we learned the Hebrew transliteration of the word *fear* is to reverence and respect the Lord. It is through this fear David realized he had nothing to fear. David experienced the freedom and joy that accompanies this right fear and invites us into the classroom for lessons in No Fear 101.

He starts class with this hooking phrase, "Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days ..." Quite honestly, I don't know many people who would not want to see many good days; however, loving life is another story. Let's face it, life can be hard and can sometimes be hard to love.

Think about it: What does loving life mean to you? Do you love life?

Read Genesis 1:27.

What makes your life so very valuable?

The value of our life is not determined by our circumstances or difficulties we face. Our life mirrors the image of God, therefore is worthy of loving. Let's resolve to love life regardless of our circumstances. Yes, let's love life.

The Whoevers

In determining to love life, we also choose to be a "whoever." Dictionary.com defines *whoever* as: whatever person or anyone. The second lesson in No Fear 101 is to understand a "whoever" is anyone that keeps evil from their tongue, speaks truth, does good, seeks and pursues peace. Let's examine what it means to be a "whoever."

A "whoever" thinks before speaking and understands the power of the tongue. They use their lips to compliment and encourage, not insult and discourage.

Read Proverbs 18:21.

What kind of power does the tongue have?

As a "whoever" we have the power to build up or destroy one's life with our words. When my daughter was little I was unknowingly destroying her life by repeating a hurtful phrase when she whined. With her sweet innocent voice she said, "Mommy, will you please not call me that again. It hurts my feeling." Point made. I never destroyed my little girl again.

Read Ephesians 4:29.

What type of words does a "whoever" speak?

In addition to speaking truth, a “whoever” does good as well as seeks and pursues peace.

Doing Good

Good. What does it mean exactly? This somewhat plain and overused word becomes colorful and alive as the meaning is unpacked. *Good* means morally excellent, virtuous, and righteous. I love how those beautiful words roll off the tongue. Simply put, a “whoever” does what is right.

Doing what is right in a world of corruption, dishonesty, temptation, and seduction is not easy. Our world tells us, “Go ahead, do what *feels* good, not what *is* good. No one is watching.” Doing the right thing is often rejected and we can be ridiculed by others for choosing good. This reaction many times causes us, who are doing right, to withdraw, leaving the world to ask, “Where did all the good people go?”

Read 1 Peter 2:20.

How does God respond to those who suffer when doing good?

Seek and Pursue Peace

David states a “whoever” not only seeks [try to find, search], but also pursues [to strive to gain] peace. “Whoever” are people of action. God expects us to go after peace, not just sit around and pray for it to come about. We are to be conduits of peace, creating an environment for peace to prosper in a world of chaos and war.

Read Romans 12:18.

What does Paul have to say about peace?

“*Possible*” removes the pressure of peace from our shoulders and places it on God’s shoulders. By using the word “*if*” Paul suggests living in peace with some individuals might be difficult. We seek and pursue peace, then leave all possibilities up to God because He has the power to make possibilities reality.

Is there someone in your life you find the possibility of peace difficult to imagine? Write Jesus’ words on the lines below. Commit Matthew 19:26 to memory.

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 35

Author: David

If you were given the opportunity to get even with or bring harm to an enemy, how would you respond? David's decision to leave his vindication in God's hands makes me respect him more than ever. He demonstrated wisdom, self-control, and spirit-submission when he allowed Saul to walk out of the cave unharmed (1 Samuel 24).

This decision was a result of a life committed to fearing and obeying the Lord. David knew his enemy, but he also knew his God. His desire to obey God trumped his desire to destroy his enemy.

Defining Enemy

Our enemy is not necessarily someone wearing a dark coat waiting in the bushes to cause us bodily harm. Our enemy can be someone we know: a former friend, family member, or co-worker. An enemy is a person who feels toward, fosters harmful designs, or engages in antagonistic activities against another. The sad but true fact is there are people in this world who are just not nice and they find pleasure in bringing mayhem into the lives of others.

This doesn't seem fair to the individuals who desire to love life and live right. Why should those living right be wronged?

Read John 16:33.

What does Jesus say we will have in this world? How should we respond?

In the '70s, singer Lynn Anderson released the chart topper, *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*. God didn't promise us a rose garden either, but according to scripture He did make a couple of promises we can take to the bank.

Read Deuteronomy 31:6. Write God's promise in the blank below.

Read 1 John 4:4.

How are we equipped to overcome our enemy?

Dealing with Our Enemy

Until a few years ago, I never really thought about having an enemy until hostility grew between me and another person. The hostility turned to resentment. Harmful designs and antagonistic activities planned for me were revealed. Eventually the resentment turned to rage. The pain of this betrayal was like no other and I was caught off-guard as hate began to rise up within me toward this person.

Like David, I turned to God for help. In His true, faithful, and humorous style, He helped me deal with my enemy by dealing with me.

Have you been in a place of “enough is enough” with an enemy? This is where you would have found me just a few years ago. Actually, I had passed enough is enough and was facing my wits’ end.

With prayers full of “Dear Lord, fight against those who fight against me” and “Come to my aid,” I went to God with my hurt and pain. Expecting sympathy, I instead received instructions. He did not deliver my enemy into my hands; He delivered His Word to my heart.

There, in black and white, were God’s instructions for dealing with those who feel hatred for God’s children and foster harmful designs toward them or engage in antagonistic activities against us. Imagine my chagrin when I read the following scripture.

Read Luke 6:27-28.

How does God desire His children to deal with enemies? Circle the action words.

To say that I was disappointed when I read these words would be an understatement. The harmful designs and antagonistic activities were against me, yet God was telling me to love, do good, bless, and even pray for this person. Seriously?

At times I felt hypocritical because I did not really mean my prayers, but I continued to obey God because of my love for Him. I would be less than truthful if I said the prayers were answered and all is well with the person now. Quite honestly, my jaw still tightens and eyes still roll when this person’s name is mentioned. Even though I still battle my feelings, ignoring them gives them power over me. Acting on the truth in Luke 6 gives me power over my feelings.

Read John 8:32.

What does truth offer God’s children?

While I still battle my feelings, they no longer hold me in bondage. The truth has set me free! And my friend, it will do the same for you.

Read Luke 6:27-36. Pause and pray for those who mistreat you. Continue to pray this truth even if you don’t *feel* the words. In time the truth will become part of you and freedom will be yours.

God’s Response to Our Enemy

God delights in delivering His children from heartache and hard times. Our struggles and the mystery of deliverance have guaranteed purpose in our life. Just as sure as deliverance from Egypt was for the Israelites, so is deliverance for you and me. Our job is to live the truth God has outlined in Luke 6:27-28 and let God settle the score.

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 36

Author: David

In David's oracle I hear the voice of one whose heart is concerned for the sinful patterns of the wicked. Such patterns lead to self-destruction and Kingdom devastation.

In our study of Psalm 10 we learned the word *wicked* is the Hebrew word *rasha'* (raw-shaw'), which means guilty of hostility and sin against man or God. We determined whether saved or unsaved we all are guilty of being wicked at one time or another. In this divine revelation from the heart, David outlines how the wicked become wicked. In reading between the lines we discover how the righteous become righteous.

Do the Opposite

There was a character on a very popular sitcom that aired several years ago who had a confidence problem. He could not keep a job, stay in a relationship, and still lived with his parents. Every decision he made that seemed natural to him failed.

On a whim, in an effort to change his miserable circumstances, he stopped doing what came natural and instead did the opposite. Incredibly, things in his life turned around. The same is true for each of us. Miraculous living happens as we live in the spiritual rather than the natural. Things turn around.

Read Romans 6:19.

How does Paul describe our *natural* selves?

How are our energies best spent?

Sin is only fun for so long. Slavery to sin wears a body out mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Strength and power are by-products of a life spent doing what is right, pleasing, and correct. Energy spent on righteousness creates more energy to spend on more righteousness and the power to live in the spiritual rather than the natural.

Read 2 Peter 1:3.

How has God prepared us to do the opposite?

The Opposites

No Fear for God. The opposite: Fear God

By now each of us should be quite confident in the meaning of *fear of the Lord*. To prove how smart you are, in the blanks below write in your own words what *fear of the Lord* means.

The fear of the Lord is showing reverence and respect for the Lord in word and deed. Such a fear grows and develops as the focus of our energy becomes living sin-free and in peace with God and man.

Our opposites are outlined in verses 2-4. The wicked abide in self, doing what comes natural rather than abiding in the Spirit and following His leading. We have already talked about the opposite of failing to fear the Lord. Let's take a look at other opposites we should apply to our life.

Don't Flatter Yourself (v2)

"It's hard to be humble when you are as good as I am." Wisdom screams from this screen-printed t-shirt popular in the '80s. A humble person deflects praise and projects the glory to God. In doing so, we are protected. You see, pride destroys individuals and the destruction of God's children brings destruction to God's Kingdom.

Read Psalm 10:4 and fill in the blank.

The wicked makes no room for _____ .

If You Can't Say Anything Nice Then Keep Your Mouth Shut (v3)

I could fill an ocean with the unkind things that have spewed from my lips. Many people have fallen victim to my sharp tongue and sarcastic discourse. Sarcasm combined with a quick wit is a lethal combination. It is a good thing we have the Holy Spirit to filter what comes out of our mouth. My tongue is not completely tamed, but through His Spirit and His Word there are fewer victims.

Read Psalm 141:3. Write it below and commit it to memory.

Think About What You Are Thinking About (v4)

A few years ago my night meditation was television ... wrong television. The shows made me laugh, but were crude and promoted ideas that were contrary to the ways of the Lord. The Holy Spirit examined my heart and asked me to think about the things I was filling myself with. He then directed me to turn the television off. Was I plotting evil? No. But I was accepting wrong.

Read Joshua 1:8.

How can we stay off a sinful course?

Doing the opposite isn't easy and often not popular; however, the rewards far exceed any benefits we could possibly reap from the natural.

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 37

Author: David

David shares some secrets; secrets that have the potential to radically revolutionize our relationship with the Lord, in fact, all of our relationships. I learned when my vertical relationship is strong, I am less likely to come unglued when trials and troubles with my horizontal relationships arise.

What David teaches goes beyond pleasing God, he says we can delight God. Can you just imagine? I have to tell you, such a thought sends shivers up my spine, a tremble in my heart, and a smile on my face. Before studying David's secrets we must first heed his warning.

Don't Fret

Do you have a tendency to pay attention to something when it is repeated? Me, too. David starts the psalm with a "don't fret phrase" then repeats the phrase twice in eight verses. I think he is trying to make a point. What do you think?

Fret is feel or express worry, annoyance, or discontent. As we read the text following the first two "don't fret phrases" we discover each have to do with another person's success, specifically those who are evil but still succeed. I am not gonna lie, this has been a tough one for me over the years. Annoyance and discontent rise within when "she" gets the "such and such" even though I have been doing "it" longer and after all, started "it."

Jealousy is a delight bandit. Just when we are enjoying a little happy, it sneaks up and pickpockets our delight. Fretting is dangerous to our relationship with God as well as our relationship with others. In the final "don't fret phrase" David gives a strong warning about fretting.

Read Psalm 37:8

What is David's warning?

Fretting replaces the peace that accompanies our delighting in God, thus keeping God from delighting in us. Girls, we have got to get hold of ourselves. David suggests if we don't control fretting, it is possible to behave like the very people we are frettin' over. If this is true, then what is a girl to do when "she" gets the "such and such?"

Read Psalm 64:1a. Write the verse in the line below.

Read Philippians 4:6-7

How does God want us to handle our anxious thoughts?

What is the result of obeying verse six?

Can we let these wise old words be our guide: Don't ya'll fret none-'ya hear?

We have heeded the warning; now let's study the secrets, secrets that can radically revolutionize our relationships, especially our relationship with the Lord.

Secret 1: Be still (v7)

Being still helps us know God, but being still is so very hard. Does it seem your day passes by so fast you are certain you pass yourself? Girls, we can't wait until we are not busy to be still and get to know God. We will never not be busy. We need to discipline ourselves to be still in the moment, that moment when we sense His presence or feel His Spirit. Just stop and be still.

Are you afraid of being still? If so, why? Be still and share your fears with God.

Secret 2: Commit (v5)

Committing our ways to the Lord builds our trust. Our ways are difficult to surrender because we make decisions and plans based on what we see and on circumstances that arise. God makes decisions and plans on what He sees. His view extends beyond what we see. His knowledge of our circumstances exceeds what we know. Therefore, He proves Himself trustworthy of our ways.

Read Proverbs 3:5-6

What happens to our path as we commit our ways to God?

Secret 3: Trust (v3)

Trust is developed through experience. As we trust Him we experience the rhythm of His grace and the measure of His faithfulness. Through our experiences of trusting God, life becomes lighter and almost tender at times. Troubles do not disappear, but the new measure of faith diminishes their intensity.

Read Proverbs 3:5

How are we to trust God?

Secret 4: Delight (v4)

A by-product of trusting God is delight: our delight in Him and His delight in us. Saying the word delight makes my body smile. We begin to long for what He longs for and love what He loves. Our prayers become God-centered rather than self-centered. Therefore, He is pleased to say yes to all we ask that is in agreement with His perfect plan for us and His kingdom.

Secret 5: Wait (7)

As we delight in God and He delights in us, waiting almost becomes delightful. Seriously. In learning to trust Him we see all things work together for our good and His glory. Being still and waiting provides opportunities to build greater trust, experience more delight, and get to know Him more intimately.

What are your thoughts about waiting?

Delighting Leads to More Delighting

When we delight in the Lord, He will in turn delight in us (Verse 23). He holds us with His powerful right hand. He makes our steps firm and keeps us from falling when we stumble.

Spend some time discovering what delights the Lord.

Obedience more than sacrifice	1 Samuel 15:22
The walk of the blameless	Proverbs 11:20
Truthfulness	Proverbs 12:22
His people	Psalms 149:4

God surely delights in His children. How are you presently delighting Him?

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 38

Author: David (some suggest Job)

David is seeking forgiveness. We are not given details of his sin, but we are told quite graphically of the manifestation of his delayed repentance. Living in a state of habitual sin, ignoring the conviction of the Holy Spirit, is dangerous to our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Healing comes through confession and receiving God's forgiveness.

God is Holy and cannot be in sin's presence. Our sin lodges itself in the middle of our relationship with Him, creating a sense of detachment. The primary role of the Holy Spirit is to guide us back to God through the power of conviction of our sin. If we fail to yield to the whisper, He speaks louder. If we continue to turn a deaf ear to the Spirit's prompting, our Daddy steps in or He steps back allowing us to live in sinful choices for a time.

Discipline: "This Hurts Me More Than It Hurts You"

Until becoming a parent I never truly understood the phrase, "This hurts me more than it hurts you." I heard this when my mother restricted me to my room with no television because I repeatedly did not complete homework assignments. She loved me and knew I loved being outside with my friends, but knew I needed to learn to complete my homework. I did not understand her deep love for me. My pain hurt her.

Discipline is a necessary part of parenting. It is one of, if not the most difficult, part of parenting. Effective discipline is a delicate balancing act. It must be memorable in order to modify the wrong behavior, the severity should match the degree of the offense, and perhaps most important, administered from a heart of love.

Read Job 5:17.

How does Job describe the man God disciplines? _____

Read Hebrews 12:5-7.

What emotion motivates God's discipline? _____

"Because I love you"

At times it may seem we are getting away with our sin because there is not an immediate consequence. Rest assured God is not a lazy parent. He can't ignore the offenses of His children anymore than He can ignore their cries. His grace is endless to all who will receive it. He loves us too much not to correct us.

Read Hebrews 12:10.

What is the purpose of God's discipline?

Read Joel 2:13.

How does God feel *about* disciplining His children?

We are created in the image of God and are co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). Our family heritage is holiness. God is Holy. Christ is Holy. God's discipline shapes us into the image of the family line.

Think about it: Sit quietly and talk to God about His discipline in your life. How do you feel about your holiness?

Discipline: If It Isn't Hurtin', It isn't Workin'

Words like punishment and discipline may carry a girl back to a painful place from the past, touching a tender, perhaps even a raw place in her heart. We can rest assured, God's purpose in discipline is not to traumatize, but to transform. He can be trusted with the pains of our past as well as the hope for our future. Discipline is part of the hope. We are unable to live in this hope if we remain enslaved to our sin. Until we surrender to God's discipline, we walk bound to our sin instead of in freedom with our Savior.

Read Galatians 5:1.

What does Christ's death have to do with our sin?

Fifteen years of parenting has taught me if discipline does not hurt, it does not work. For my daughter, revoking television privileges was meaningless, but removing the door to her bedroom was monumental. It hurt. It worked. God knows in order for discipline to be effective it must be memorable. A short memory creates repeat offenders.

Read Hebrews 12:11.

What does discipline produce?

Feeling His Pain

A few years ago my son Griffin, who was eight at the time, became a repeat offender. Previous discipline had failed; therefore, the intensity had to be taken up a notch.

It was School Skate Night and he had been talking about skating with his friends for days. I took both children to Skate Night, but both did not skate. While my daughter skated, my son watched. Instead of sitting with the other moms, God had me sit with my little boy and hold him as he cried, watching the skaters glide by.

Griffin cried and so did his mommy. In a brief but tender moment God let me feel His pain. He gave me the privilege to glimpse into His heart and see the great love it takes to discipline and the pain the disciplinarian experiences. His love sent His Son to the cross. After such a sacrifice, how could He leave us to our own folly?

He remembers our frame and knows that we are dust. He may sometimes chasten us, it is true, but even this He does with a smile, the proud, tender smile of a Father who is bursting with pleasure over an imperfect but promising son who is coming every day to look more and more like the One whose child he is. -A.W. Tozer

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 39

Author: David

As I read our Psalm, no disrespect to David, but I thought of Eeyore, you know, the gray donkey from *Winnie the Pooh*, who is always losing his tail. It seemed at first this was another “whoa is me, I lost my tail” kind-of song until I read the words in verse 4: *“Show me, O Lord, my life’s end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life.”*

David points out the brevity of life. We are but a handbreadth, figuratively speaking the width of our hand. What if we lived life in complete awareness of this truth? What if we allowed this truth to compel us to live life to the maximum? In maximizing our living our struggles minimize, not magically disappear but supernaturally no longer consume us. We’ve been given new life, let’s maximize it! (Rom.6:4)

A Maximized Life Magnifies God

Maximize means to increase to the greatest possible degree. Our life will be maximized to the greatest possible degree when we intentionally magnify God. As we make God greater the world will see the greatness of God. Jesus teaches the “how-to” of maximizing God in the book of John.

Read John 3:30

How do we magnify God? Write the complete instruction in the line below.

The concept of decreasing self is foreign to a world that promotes the exact opposite. As we decrease self and increase God, we begin to experience a life most only dream of living. Not necessarily an increase of worldly wealth and pleasures, but the increase and fullness of the supernatural activity of the Holy Spirit working in and through us. All I can say is sign me up!

Read Matthew 10:39

What is found when we decrease self and increase Christ?

Read John 10:10

What kind of life did Jesus come to give?_____

A Maximum Life is Balanced

A maximized life rests upon God’s understanding of time. God created time and determines our steps by eternity’s clock and calendar. He is therefore trustworthy of directing our commitments and setting our agendas. The recording of creation in Genesis demonstrates His desire for order and simplicity. When we assume the role of calendar keeper, the scales of balance tilt, opposing His design for our life.

Read Joshua 10:13

How did God demonstrate His control of time to Joshua? He can do the same for us.

In maximizing God, we minimize self and enjoy the experience of the abundant life Jesus came to give everyone who believes.

A Maximum Life Loves

Love motivated God to send His Son to the cross. Decreasing self and increasing Christ will produce an insatiable love for God, His Word, and His ways. This maximized life of love will compel us to extend to God's people mercy, compassion, and grace, we never knew we had to give. His maximized love magnifies Him. Love will maximize our life!

Read Mark 12:30-31

How are we to love God?

How are we to love others?

Is there anything greater than this commandment? _____

Let's be honest girls: some people are not nice. Taking it further, it seems some people go out of their way to intentionally be *not nice*. We extend love because love was extended to us. (Rom. 5:8)

A Maximum Life is Generous

In our world of *much* it is hard to see those who have *little*, but there are so many who have little. The role of God's people is to care and provide for those in need. He blesses so we can share our blessings. The life which maximizes generosity shares more than food and shelter. Maximized generosity offers compassion when sorrows are shared, godly wisdom when counsel is needed, and love when a heart is hurting.

Read Proverbs 11:25

What is God's response to those who refresh others?

A maximizing life magnifies God. He knows the number of our days. Let's determine to make the most of our days by living life to the max!

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 40

Author: David

David has been lifted out of a messy and slimy situation. He is possibly speaking of a literal place such as a dungeon, cistern, or grave since he hid in such places on the run from Saul. Or he could have written from an emotional dungeon, a place where he felt disregarded by God. Whether David's place of captivity was figurative or literal, there is little doubt he had to wait to be rescued.

Waiting is difficult in the best and the worst of circumstances. Our anticipation builds. Our heart races, knowing something big is going to happen. Like David, we have spent some time in dark, lonely places of confinement waiting for God to come to our rescue. Maybe, you are still waiting.

Defining P.I.T.

At one time or another we all have been in a pit: a *Personally Intense Trial*. Our descent into the mud and mire may have been caused by our own wrong choices or we were sent plunging into the abyss by a push we received from someone else. No matter how we arrived in our *personally intense trial*, we have all cried out, begging God not to withhold His mercy.

Even though it may seem our cries fall on deaf ears, God does not have a history of ignoring the cries of His children. He responded to Hagar's cries after Abraham sent her away with Ishmael (Gen. 20:8-21). He heard Joseph's cries from prison (Gen. 39). Moses was sent to rescue the Israelites because God could no longer stand by and watch their abuse (Ex. 3:7). You and I are of the same family line as Hagar, Joseph, and the Israelites. Rest assured our cries are always heard and our rescue is always right on time.

Read Psalm 102:17-18.

What was written so future generations would praise Him?

Read Zephaniah 3:17.

How does Zephaniah describe God's ability to rescue? _____

How does He feel about rescuing His children? _____

Adjusting Our Perspective of a P.I.T.

God has the power and desire to save His children, yet at times He chooses to delay the rescue. The delay may cause us to doubt God's love and ability to rescue us.

What if we changed our perspective while we waited? Such an adjustment could change a *personally intense trial* to a *period in time* when God desires to revolutionize our relationship with Him rather than simply shift our situation. Instead of hopeless, we can become full of hope. Rather than cries of anguish, with confidence in God's sovereignty, we can sigh in peace. We view the trial as a test to purify our faith, rather than wreak destruction in our lives.

Read Isaiah 64:4.

What does God do for those who wait on Him?

While We Wait

God revolutionized His relationship with the Israelites as they waited out their 70 year P.I.T. in Babylon. In Jeremiah we can glean from their experience how to not only survive, but thrive in our time in our P.I.T.

Read Jeremiah 29:4-14.

Make yourself at home (vs 4-6)

These are not exactly the words you want to hear as you cry and beg to be pulled from your P.I.T. However, these verses teach us we can establish a routine and sense of normalcy even in trials and hard times. In our wait, prosperity and productivity are possible. God works on our behalf, even in our personal intense trials. Isn't this good news?!

Read James 1:3.

What does our P.I.T. produce?

Why is it necessary to go through such trials?

Seek to Live in Peace (v7)

In His wisdom and sovereignty, God may choose to place us right in the center of enemy territory. This position has the potential to ignite emotions and produce intense anxiety. In response to the intensity, we may try to devise a plan to get out of our P.I.T. God's desire is not a quick exit, but a quickened spirit surrendered to Him in order to strengthen our faith. A quick and premature exit may cause us to miss the refinement our faith needs.

Read 1 Peter 1:7.

What is the end result of all personal intense trials?

There is an exit strategy (v10)

Each P.I.T. has a planned exit. We can trust God to come and get us because His plans for us are good and full of hope. His plans are too great to leave us in a P.I.T. We can trust that He always wants to do something new in our lives.

Read Isaiah 43:18-19.

What does God want us to forget? What does He want us to see?

Sometimes God doesn't send instant delivery because He wants us to get to know our Deliverer. ~Beth Moore

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

Psalm 41

Author: David

In this final Psalm of Book 1, David is carrying the burden of sin and feeling betrayed by a friend. Hard times have a tendency to make us momentarily lose sight of God. Our mind drifts down the road of negative thinking. Our heart wonders about God's love and questions if He truly understands our pain and suffering. Have no doubt—the suffering we endure does not go unrecognized or unsympathized.

Read Hebrews 4:15.

Who is able to sympathize with us? Why?

Jesus can identify completely with our pain and suffering. He was tempted (Mt. 4:1-11). He was rejected by family (Luke 4:16-30). He was falsely accused (Luke 23). He was abandoned by His closest friends. (Mt. 26:56) He endured physical abuse (John 19:1). Enough said, don't you agree? He gets it!

Sharing in Suffering

God can and does sympathize with our pain. Since we are created in God's image, He expects us to reflect His image of His love and compassion by sympathizing with the weak. Weak is defined as restrained by physical frailty, poor, depressed, low, and helpless. Do you know anyone who fits this description?

This mandate is not an option, but a responsibility. As we obey the mandate we realize what God calls a responsibility is actually a privilege. Serving and caring for others minimizes our own troubles and trials. This is a phenomenon I cannot explain.

In the midst of mountain high troubles, taking a meal to someone in need reduces the size of my mountains. Stepping out of my self-centeredness to care for someone in crisis lifts my spirit. Taking the time to sit with a friend and share her pain refreshes me. It is supernatural indeed! We feel better when we help another.

Read Proverbs 11:25

What happens to the person who cares for and sympathizes with others?

The weak are not necessarily the man on the corner holding the "Will work for food sign" or the lady pushing her personal belongings in a shopping cart. The weak are not just found in third-world countries. The weak are all around us. Some days, the weak can be found by looking in the mirror.

Pause to pray. Ask God to help you see the weak and provide courage to reach out.

Read Matthew 25:34-40.

As we minister to the weak, figuratively to whom are we ministering?

Returning the Blessing

Read Psalm 41:1.

How is the man who regards the weak described?

Those who regard the weak are blessed. Blessed is the Hebrew word *esher* (eh'-sher), which means happy. Our obedience to God's directive helps the weak and at the same time delivers happiness straight to our heart. In happiness we are able to see pleasure amid disappointment, victory instead defeat, and optimism rather than pessimism.

David goes on to detail the many ways God looks after *those* who look after *His*. He mentions five "God wills" in verses 1-3. *Will* is a present tense singular verb which translates as *am* and means determined to, expect to, require to, or about to. Before we apply our grammar lesson to David's words, let's see the power.

Read Exodus 3:14.

How does God refer to Himself?

God is "I Am." The "God Wills" in our text can be understood as "I AMs." Fill in the blanks with God's Name, then read them out loud.

- _____ delivers him in times of trouble.
- _____ protects him and preserves his life.
- _____ blesses him in the land. (asher -to go straight, advance)
- _____ sustains and restores his health.

Who is the *him* in our passage? _____

Him is the man who regards the weak. With this holy covering from I AM, why would we not regard the weak? Girls, there is so much more at stake than being happy. How powerful it would be if we all, the church at large, could replace *him* with our own name. We can, if we obey and regard the weak.

Personal Reflection and Application

What has God revealed to me in this lesson? How will I respond?

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The Treasury of David

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Excerpt from *A Confident Heart* by Renee Swope ~Study of Psalm 3

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If you were inspired by *Trusting God for a Better Tomorrow* and yearn to deepen your own personal relationship with Jesus Christ, I encourage you to connect with Proverbs 31 Ministries. Proverbs 31 Ministries exists to be a trusted friend who will take you by the hand and walk by your side, leading you one step closer to the heart of God through:

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About the Author

Wendy is a wife to Scott, mother to Blaire and Griffin, an author, speaker, and Bible study teacher. Whether in the pulpit or on paper, her passion is Biblical application. She loves to see women experience the connection between life and God's Word.

She loves lazy Sundays watching golf with her husband, talking interior design with her daughter, and eating Bojangles with her son. Wendy's bucket list includes being the murder mystery to solve on the crime show drama Crime Scene Investigation (Vegas) and holding the hush-board on the 16th green Sunday afternoon at the Masters.

Wendy leads women all over the world to life-change through her in-depth online Bible studies. She is witty, down-to-earth, and transparent. She teaches in such way that every woman feels that Wendy is speaking directly to her heart.

Women who hear Wendy speak leave with a

- Craving for God's Word
- Confidence in Christ to bring about life change
- Commitment to be more intentional about spending time in God's Word

Visit www.wendypope.org for more about Wendy, to purchase her resources, or invite her to speak to the women of your fellowship.

What Others are Saying about Wendy

“Bible Study isn't just about filling in the blanks, it's about digging deep and allowing God's Word to shape and mold us. Wendy's study of the Bible gives a fresh perspective and insightful questions that help you examine and personalize God's truth.”

Carol Davis~ Radio Host, 106.9 The Light

“You have no idea how much this series is helping me learn the Bible...thank you so much! I am so glad I found you!”

Marilyn Gray ~Online Bible Study Member

“Very quickly the tender and honest emotions of the Psalms begin to resonate and encourage a seeking soul as author Wendy Pope walks us through God's Word, one Psalm at a time. Her reflections each day succinctly captivate the essence of the message, revealing truth and personalizing God's Word. With insight, Wendy helps the searching heart internalize each passage through an easy to follow daily reading schedule, guiding the participant through questions that bring assurance of God's love and His plan for our lives. Joy Brown ~Online Bible Study Member

“We had no idea all the lessons and instructions that God had stored for us in Psalms when we began this study! With each new Psalm, our eyes have been opened to something we needed to ask forgiveness for or do so that our walk would be more like Jesus. Through this study we have been brought closer to God in our relationship with Him and struggles in life and situations that have happened in our life have been so much easier since we began this study. And we thought Psalms was only a boring book of poetry! What a great journey this has been for us as a couple!”

Bob and Jane Dean ~Online Bible Study Members and Small Group Leaders

Worry. Pride. Revenge. Jealousy. Trust. Betrayal. Rejection.

Have you ever found yourself swept away by any of one or more of these emotions?

Perhaps you are overtaken by them all at once.

You are not alone. We are not alone.

David, perhaps the greatest king and military leader of his time lived, much of his life on the run from his enemies and mocked by his friends. He struggled in his faith and lived with emotional unrest. He questioned God about his painful circumstances. He wanted a better tomorrow.

Many years ago, tired of the tired pace I was keeping I decided to open my Bible and read the Psalms, one at a time. Wounds from my past that never properly healed began to mend. The unrest in my heart settled as peace grew roots and doubt turned to trust. Yes, my tomorrows were getting better. I learned tomorrows are better when:

- My future is not shaped by mistakes of the past
- My pain becomes a place our faith can grow
- My fear of God is stronger than my fears of the world
- My sorrow for sin is replaced with the freedom of forgiveness
- My fervor for revenge surrenders to God's judgment
- My joy is found in things of God rather than the things of this world

"Want to study the Bible but don't quite know where to start? Let practical teacher Wendy Pope be your personal guide. Wendy has a keen knack for making the ancient scriptures relevant to today's busy woman. Join her as the wisdom-laden words of the Psalms come alive and leap off of the pages and into your thoughts, heart, and actions. This book will become your step-by-step manual for not just reading, but experiencing and applying the Holy Scriptures."

Karen Ehman, Proverbs 31 Ministries Director of Speakers, author of six books including LET. IT. GO. How to Stop Running the Show & Start Walking in Faith, wife of Todd and mother of three



About Wendy

Wendy is a wife and mother, and a woman who loves a good bargain from her favorite place to shop...Good Will. She's the author of *Out of the Mouths of Babes*, contributing author to *God's Purpose for Every Woman*, *The Reason We Speak* and the *Real Life Devotional Bible for Women* (NIV). You can read Wendy's devotions in *Encouragement for Today* online devotions, which reach over 500,000 daily. She leads thousands of women to life change through the power of God's Word each day in her online Bible Studies.