

Psalm



*JESUS IS THE ANSWER TO
THE CRIES OF GOD'S PEOPLE*

*STUDY WRITTEN AND TAUGHT BY
BRANDY ELDRIDGE AND MELANI GRONE*

GRAPHICS BY MELONY LUCAS



Psalms



JESUS IS THE ANSWER TO THE CRIES OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Since the time they were written and compiled into a book, the psalms have been used as a guide for how to pour our hearts out before God: in celebration, in worship, in need, and even in complaint. **These 150 poems give us a peek at the hearts of some of the faithful followers of God who have come before us—what they rejoiced in, what they longed for, what they grieved over, what they found rest and satisfaction in, and what they hoped for the future.** We discover within the psalms that our struggles and victories echo theirs. We find relatable emotions and questions expressed within the verses penned so many centuries ago.

In the final chapter of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus appears to his disciples and one last time explains to them the meaning of his life, ministry, death, and resurrection. In his words, **“This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms”** (Luke 24:44). Jesus is clear in His assertion that it is not just the law and prophecy that find their fulfillment in Him, but also the psalms!

The psalms are our biblical model for how to cry out to God, and they also teach us how Jesus is God’s answer to those cries.

*CHRIST IS GOD'S ANSWER TO
OUR CRIES FOR JUSTICE AND
FOR MERCY, CRIES OF LAMENT
AND OF REJOICING, CRIES
FOR HELP AND THANKSGIVING
AT HIS DELIVERANCE, CRIES
FOR FORGIVENESS
AND GRACE.*

BACKGROUND ON THE BOOK OF PSALMS

The book of Psalms was written by a variety of people over the course of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (about 1500 BC) to the time God's people returned from exile in Babylon (538 BC). About half of the psalms were written by David, who the Bible calls a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:11-14). A fifth of the psalms were written by other authors, including Moses, Asaph, and the Sons of Korah. The remainder of the psalms do not have a clearly identified author. The book of Psalms was most likely assembled into the form we now have after the return of God's people from exile in Babylon. Rather than appearing chronologically, they are arranged into five major groups based on specific themes.

<p><i>BOOK ONE - DAVID'S TEARS</i> <i>PSALMS 1-41</i></p> <p>These are predominantly psalms of lament from David.</p>	<p><i>BOOK TWO - TENSION IN THE REIGN OF THE KING</i> <i>PSALMS 42-72</i></p> <p>These psalms largely deal in stark honesty with the sin and moral failings of God's people as well as those of the human king chosen to rule them.</p>
<p><i>BOOK THREE - EXILE AND LOSS OF KINGSHIP</i> <i>PSALMS 73-89</i></p> <p>The people had mistakenly assumed the kingdom God gave them would always be theirs, no matter how they acted. These psalms deal with the aftermath of realizing how wrong they were and how big their need for God really is.</p>	<p><i>BOOK FOUR - THE LORD REIGNS</i> <i>PSALMS 90-106</i></p> <p>Here are cries for redemption, the kind that no human king or ruler can provide—only God can.</p>
<p><i>BOOK FIVE - THE RETURN OF A NEW AND BETTER DAVID</i> <i>PSALMS 107-150</i></p> <p>The book of Psalms concludes with reflection on what it means for a king to rule and reign alongside God, looking forward to a messiah that will do so in a proper and permanent way.</p>	

Additionally, **Psalms 1 and 2 are thought by many scholars to be the “gateway psalms”** which set up the main point of the book as a whole.

PSALM 1

Reflects on righteousness, which is found through meditating on and following God’s way as revealed through Scripture.



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PSALM 2

Introduces the concept of God’s anointed, a king who will prove capable of reigning over God’s people in such righteousness and thereby demonstrate worthiness to inherit God’s Kingdom.

These two psalms instruct us to consider everything in the rest of the book through the twin ideas of humanity’s struggles with righteousness and the need for God’s chosen one to bring this righteousness about as a present reality for His people. From the very opening of the book, **we can already see a path being laid for the psalms to direct us to Jesus!**


The book of Psalms is all written in Hebrew poetry. We can expect imagery and figurative language, exaggeration and hyperbole, metaphors and similes. Not everything in Psalms is meant to be taken literally. For example, Psalm 91 invites us to shelter under the wings of God. This does not mean God is a bird! Rather, the psalm is using imagery to speak a truth about God’s character—that He is a safe haven, a comfort and a refuge. Just like English poetry, Hebrew poetry aims to communicate emotion through the way it uses words to paint a picture. **As poetry, the psalms also benefit from being read repeatedly, taking time to think about and meditate on what is being said.** Like a marinade, the flavor continues to develop as you sit with it.

CRYING OUT TO GOD

For the purposes of this study, **a cry to God is anything that bursts forth from the human heart meant for His ears.** It could be a response to who He is, a request for a need to be met, a declaration of truth, or an expression of emotion. God welcomes all of these.

One of the beautiful things about the psalms is they give us language for the cries of our hearts, even those that often feel too big to put into words. The psalmists craft their words in such a way as to direct our hearts back to God, reassuring us of His character and reminding us that our hope is in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Each session of this study will look at psalms that express a similar cry and invite reflection on how Jesus answers it. The cries highlighted here are not an exhaustive list of all the types of psalms, nor does each psalm itself usually fit neatly into one category. For example, psalms seeking God's forgiveness usually contain a lament component (grieving over sin and its effects), a worship component (naming God's character), and a thanksgiving component (anticipation of being forgiven and restored).



LIKE A WATER DROPLET THAT CATCHES THE LIGHT, THE PSALMS MASTERFULLY BLEND THE INNUMERABLE CRIES OF THE HUMAN HEART INTO A MULTIFACETED REFLECTION BURSTING WITH COLORFUL LAYERS AND COMPLEXITY.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

The word gospel itself simply means **“good news.”** It serves as shorthand for the truth that God created us to reflect His glory to the world in a special way through intimate connection with Him, but humanity’s choice to sin severed that connection. We are unable to save ourselves by making our own way back to God, but because of God’s overflowing love and tender mercy, He willingly offers us salvation through Jesus. God has reforged the connection between humanity and Himself, and we are able to approach Him by His grace through faith in Jesus.

WE WERE CREATED TO REFLECT GOD’S GLORY TO THE WORLD THROUGH INTIMATE CONNECTION WITH HIM.

Genesis 1:27: So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

God created humanity to occupy a special position within the world, serving as God’s own image! This is a connection with Him that no other creature enjoys, and His assigned task for us as humans is an honor bestowed upon none but us.

HAVING REJECTED GOD’S RULES, WE CHOSE INSTEAD TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT IN OUR OWN EYES AND ARE UNABLE TO SAVE OURSELVES.

Romans 3:23: ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...

We, all of us, are sinners. Humanity chose to judge our actions by our own standards instead of abiding by God’s. Because of sin, we live in a fallen world full of brokenness and death instead of the flourishing and life that God designed us for. No amount of hustle, technological advancement, or other human effort can restore us and the world to how God created it to be.

WE ARE RECONCILED TO GOD THROUGH JESUS, WHO DIED FOR OUR SINS.

1 Peter 3:18: For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.

As both fully God and fully human, Jesus did what we could not. Completely sinless and fully righteous, He offered His life as a sacrifice for our sins, taking on the wrath and death we rightfully earned by our sin. Jesus’s sacrificial death has brought about atonement - at-one-ment with God.

OUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN, WE ARE INDWELLED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND WE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE (TITUS 3:4-7).

Salvation through Jesus was God’s plan from the beginning, and His whole life unfolded “according to the Scriptures.”

1 Corinthians 15:3-4: For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...

When writing about the gospel, Paul emphasizes how Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection all happened as the Old Testament described them. **The disciples were able to recognize Jesus as the Messiah because the psalms and other writings told them what to look for.**

WHY IS THE GOSPEL IMPORTANT FOR UNDERSTANDING PSALMS?

The Old Testament includes many themes and images that assist us in better understanding who God is and what His plan entails. Images and symbols like the Passover lamb, the structure and function of the Tabernacle and temple, the role of priests, God as a king and shepherd—all of these give us a richer understanding of God and His relationship to His people. The Psalms are unique in that they were written throughout the entire course of the history encompassed by the Old Testament. **This rich symbolism is at play in the Hebrew poetry of the psalms, which draw from and incorporate such imagery as they remember the history of God's revelation of Himself to His people.** Humanity's understanding of God and His character deepens and grows more fully rounded as God progressively interacts with and speaks to them.

For these reasons, we can see that the psalms are best understood against the beautiful and intricate theological backdrop of the full Old Testament. However, they also cannot be fully understood without God's additional revelation of Jesus Christ. **It is in Jesus that God speaks His ultimate and fully sufficient Word.** All that has come before serves to direct attention completely upon Christ. To miss Him is to miss the point of all Scripture.



THE GOSPEL PROVIDES THE LIGHT THROUGH WHICH THE FULL SPECTRUM OF MEANING IN THE PSALMS IS REVEALED, ALLOWING HUMANITY TO MARVEL AT WHAT GOD HAS DONE TO ANSWER THE CRIES OF HIS PEOPLE.

THE PSALMS AND KING DAVID

The reign of King David is one key way in which the psalms provide a clear bridge between the Old Testament revelation of God and the New Testament testimony of the work of Christ. Jesus was a biological descendent of David and the perfect king who would rule on David's throne eternally, as God promised in 2 Samuel 7:16. **A literary thread running throughout Psalms is the tension between needing this perfect king and being unable to produce him from among ourselves. David and his reign is one analogy frequently drawn upon by the psalmists to make this point.**

In some ways, **David directly foreshadows Jesus.** Many of the things David experienced, said, or struggled with point to things that Jesus experienced. New Testament authors sometimes draw these connections for us when they apply David's words to Jesus. For example, John references two psalms written by David when he describes how aspects of the crucifixion happened "that the scripture might be fulfilled" (John 19:24 and 36 reference Psalm 22:18 and Psalm 34:20, respectively).

In other ways, **David is a lot like us.** If a man like David could not obey God fully, there's no way we could either. But David's hope was not in perfect obedience and deep passion, and neither is ours. Rather, it is in a God whom David knew to be merciful, loving, compassionate, just, and faithful to keep His promises. Jesus was the answer to God's promise to David to establish his throne forever. **David valued being in God's presence over everything else, and Jesus offers us this through the Holy Spirit.**

*THE LIFE OF BLESSING DESCRIBED IN PSALMS IS LIFE IN GOD'S
KINGDOM, WITH JESUS AS THE PERFECT KING.
OUR PLACE IN THAT KINGDOM IS SECURED NOT BY BIRTHRIGHT,
NOR BY OUR OWN MERITS, BUT IN MAKING JESUS OUR KING.*



THE STRUCTURE OF THIS STUDY

In preparation for the teaching each week, you will read and reflect on a psalm that has a particular cry to God as its main theme. **Please prayerfully and honestly consider how much time you can dedicate to this study and commit to set aside that time for each session.** If that is 5 to 10 minutes, trust that the Holy Spirit knows your limitations and can still do everything He wants to in your heart during that time. If you can commit 5 hours, trust that the well will not run dry, and the Holy Spirit will make that time well spent. **No matter what you and God agree to regarding the time you will set aside for the study, we pray that your hearts would rejoice as they seek the LORD (Psalm 105:3).**

At the end of each week's study time, you will be asked to consider some additional ways you could meditate on or dig deeper into the meaning of the psalm, or of other psalms of the same type. You are free to pursue that in any way you would like. Here is a (non-exhaustive) list of ideas to consider:

- What words or phrases are repeated in this psalm? Circle/highlight them, using a distinct color for each repeated word or phrase. How does this inform your understanding of the psalm?
- What does this psalm say about God? Note where it tells about who He is, what He has done, and/or what He will do.
- Which section (book 1 - 5) of Psalms does this fall under, and does that change your perspective of the theme of the psalm?
- Are there any superscriptions that describe the circumstances prompting the psalm? If so, go read about the event.
- Is this psalm quoted anywhere in the New Testament? If so, find where (using cross references or a google search) and read how it is used there.
- Read the psalm slowly, allowing each verse to settle over you.
- Pray the psalm repeatedly throughout the week.
- Pick the verse that resonates most with you. Memorize it or write it out and tape it somewhere you will see it daily. Consider using it as the basis for a Bible journaling art piece.
- Write a journal entry based on the psalm and how the psalmist's cry resonates for you.
- Listen to the psalm set to music. You can find various such compilations by a diversity of artists on YouTube. The Psalms Project (www.thepsalmsproject.org) is a ministry in the process of setting all the psalms to music.
- Listen to the psalm in Hebrew - you can hear the rhyme and other markers of poetry even if you don't understand the words. A google search will bring up both chanted and spoken versions of the Hebrew text. Julie Gellar and Joshua Aaron are two musicians who have set some Hebrew psalms to music, as well.
- Draw inspiration from the psalmist's approach to write your own psalm built around the cry of your heart.

USE THIS SPACE TO PLAN HOW YOU WILL APPROACH THIS STUDY.

STUDY SCHEDULE

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Week One

Cries of Worship

Worship is the cry that emerges from the human heart when we get a glimpse of God's character. It stems from a recognition of who He is—and He is inherently worthy of praise! Worship may come as a contemplative, quiet reflection or emerge in joyful and boisterous outbursts. It does not always have to look the same, especially because various aspects of God's character may elicit different shades of worship. Many psalms of worship have an upbeat tone, such as Psalm 96 with its jubilant cry to sing to the LORD and celebrate His glory. In contrast, Psalm 76 offers a more subdued and somber worship which recognizes the magnitude of what it means that God is just. It is this rootedness in His character that all cries of worship have in common, regardless of the emotional tenor with which they come forth. When we appreciate who God is, we pour worship back to Him in recognition and celebration of His character.

Using cooking as an analogy, you can think of worship as salt. It is an essential ingredient in almost any recipe, savory or sweet. While it has a taste of its own, its job is to make everything else taste the way it should. Without it, you can just tell something is missing; the results will be bland. Similarly, lines of worship appear in almost every psalm, and they function to help us understand the rest of the poem in light of who God is.

This week in our homework, we will examine **Psalm 145**. During our large group session, we will focus attention on **Psalm 103**. If you would like to explore further, other recommended psalms that have worship as a main component include **Psalms 8, 96, 100, and 150**.

PSALM 145

A psalm of praise. Of David.

¹ I will exalt you, my God the King;
I will praise your name for ever and
ever.

² Every day I will praise you
and extol your name for ever and ever.

³ Great is the LORD and most worthy of
praise;
his greatness no one can fathom.

⁴ One generation commends your works to
another;
they tell of your mighty acts.

⁵ They speak of the glorious splendor of
your majesty—
and I will meditate on your wonderful
works.

⁶ They tell of the power of your awesome
works—
and I will proclaim your great deeds.

⁷ They celebrate your abundant goodness
and joyfully sing of your righteousness.

⁸ The LORD is gracious and compassionate;
slow to anger and rich in love.

⁹ The LORD is good to all;
he has compassion on all he has made.

¹⁰ All your works praise you, LORD;
your faithful people extol you.

¹¹ They tell of the glory of your kingdom
and speak of your might,

¹² so that all people may know of your
mighty acts
and the glorious splendor of your
kingdom.

¹³ Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom
And your dominion endures through all
generations.

The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises
and faithful in all he does.

¹⁴ The LORD upholds all who fall
and lifts up all who are bowed down.

¹⁵ The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food at the
proper time.

¹⁶ You open your hand
and satisfy the desires of every living
thing.

¹⁷ The LORD is righteous in all his ways
and faithful in all he does.

¹⁸ The LORD is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.

¹⁹ He fulfills the desires of those who fear
him;
he hears their cry and saves them.

²⁰ The LORD watches over all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy.

²¹ My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD.
Let every creature praise his holy name
for ever and ever.

Using one verse or a sentence of your own, what is the main point of this psalm?

How is the cry of worship reflected in the psalm? What emotion or component of the human heart is being expressed?

How does God answer this cry in Jesus?

How does the gospel inform your understanding of this psalm?

Pray this psalm back to God, thinking of a current or past situation when you felt similarly to the psalmist.

Using the ideas at the beginning of the guide or your own, what additional study will you pursue?

PSALM 103

Of David.

¹ Praise the LORD, my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy
name.
² Praise the LORD, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—
³ who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
⁴ who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and
compassion,
⁵ who satisfies your desires with good
things
so that your youth is renewed like
the eagle's.

⁶ The LORD works righteousness
and justice for all the oppressed.

⁷ He made known his ways to Moses,
his deeds to the people of Israel;
⁸ The LORD is compassionate and
gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.
⁹ He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins
deserve
or repay us according to our
iniquities.
¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above
the earth,
so great is his love for those who
fear him;
¹² as far as the east is from the west,
So far has he removed our
transgressions from us.

¹³ As a father has compassion on his
children,
so the LORD has compassion on
those who fear him;
¹⁴ for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.
¹⁵ The life of mortals is like grass,
they flourish like a flower of the field;
¹⁶ the wind blows over it and it is gone,
and its place remembers it no more.
¹⁷ But from everlasting to everlasting
the LORD's love is with those who
fear him,
and his righteousness with their
children's children—
¹⁸ with those who keep his covenant
And remember to obey his precepts.

¹⁹ The LORD has established his throne in
heaven,
And his kingdom rules over all.

²⁰ Praise the LORD, you his angels,
you mighty ones who do his bidding,
who obey his word.
²¹ Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts,
you his servants who do his will.
²² Praise the LORD, all his works
Everywhere in his dominion.

Praise the LORD, my soul.

CRIES OF WORSHIP - PSALM 103 TEACHING NOTES



CRIES OF WORSHIP - ADDITIONAL NOTES



Week Two

Cries of Thanksgiving



Thanksgiving is our heart response when we see God's goodness at work. Where we have defined worship specifically as a response to who God *is*, thanksgiving is a response to what God *does*. It is impossible to separate the two, however, since God's works flow directly out of and testify to His character. We can know more about what God is like by reflecting on His deeds.

Sometimes thanksgiving arises from remembering **how God has acted in history**, as we see in Psalm 136. This psalm, known for repeating "His love endures forever" after every line, recounts God's mighty deeds in creating the world, rescuing His people from Egypt, and establishing them in the Promised Land. In other psalms, thankfulness arises after a **personal experience of God's deliverance**, such as in Psalm 32 where David rejoices after God answered his prayer for forgiveness.

The homework for this week will introduce the cry of thanksgiving with **Psalm 111**, then we will look at **Psalm 40** in the large group session. Other psalms for further study on this cry include **Psalms 32, 92, 107, and 136**.

PSALM 111

¹ Praise the LORD.

I will extol the LORD with all my heart
in the council of the upright and in
the assembly.

² Great are the works of the LORD;
they are pondered by all who delight
in them.

³ Glorious and majestic are his deeds,
and his righteousness endures
forever.

⁴ He has caused his wonders to be
remembered;
the LORD is gracious and
compassionate.

⁵ He provides food for those who fear
him;
he remembers his covenant forever.

⁶ He has shown his people the power of
his works,
giving them the lands of other
nations.

⁷ The works of his hands are faithful and
just;
all his precepts are trustworthy.

⁸ They are established forever and ever,
enacted in faithfulness and
uprightness.

⁹ He provided redemption for his people;
he ordained his covenant forever—
holy and awesome is his name.

¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning
of wisdom;
All who follow his precepts have
good understanding.
To him belongs eternal praise.

Using one verse or a sentence of your own, what is the main point of this psalm?

How is the cry of thanksgiving reflected in the psalm? What emotion or component of the human heart is being expressed?

How does God answer this cry in Jesus?

How does the gospel inform your understanding of this psalm?

Pray this psalm back to God, thinking of a current or past situation when you felt similarly to the psalmist.

Using the ideas at the beginning of the guide or your own, what additional study will you pursue?

PSALM 40

For the director of music. Of David. A psalm.

¹ I waited patiently for the LORD;
he turned to me and heard my cry.
² He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire;
he set my feet on a rock
and gave me a firm place to stand.
³ He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear the LORD
and put their trust in him.

⁴ Blessed is the one
who trusts in the LORD,
who does not look to the proud,
to those who turn aside to false gods.
⁵ Many, LORD my God,
are the wonders you have done,
the things you planned for us.
None can compare with you;
were I to speak and tell of your deeds,
They would be too many to declare.

⁶ Sacrifice and offering you did not desire—
but my ears you have opened—
burnt offerings and sin offerings you did
not require.
⁷ Then I said, “Here I am, I have come—
it is written about me in the scroll.
⁸ I desire to do your will, my God;
your law is within my heart.”

⁹ I proclaim your saving acts in the great
assembly
I do not seal my lips, LORD
as you know.
¹⁰ I do not hide your righteousness in my
heart;
I speak of your faithfulness and your
saving help.
I do not conceal your love and your
faithfulness
from the great assembly.

¹¹ Do not withhold your mercy from me, LORD;
may your love and faithfulness always
protect me.
¹² For troubles without number surround me;
my sins have overtaken me, and I
cannot see.
They are more than the hairs of my head
and my heart fails within me.
¹³ Be pleased to save me, LORD;
come quickly, LORD, to help me.

¹⁴ May all who want to take my life
be put to shame and confusion;
May all who desire my ruin
be turned back in disgrace.
¹⁵ May those who say to me, “Aha! Aha!”
be appalled at their own shame.
¹⁶ But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who long for you saving ways
always say,
“The LORD is great!”

¹⁷ But as for me, I am poor and needy;
May the Lord think of me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
you are my God, do not delay.

CRIES OF THANKSGIVING - PSALM 40 TEACHING NOTES



CRIES OF THANKSGIVING - ADDITIONAL NOTES





Week Three



Cries of Lament

Lament is the cry to God arising from recognition that the world is not as it should be. It may be a reflection upon the brokenness present in ourselves or the world in general, the sin of God's own people, our own sin, or the decay and degradation present in creation itself. Often the lament psalms are churning with grief, sorrow, confusion, and even doubt. It is not uncommon to hear the question "Why?" echoing time and again within these psalms.

However, many psalms of lament **include reassurance of God's faithfulness and trustworthiness.** The psalmists recognize that we do not walk our grief alone. This is not just lip service paid to the idea, however. Just like us, the psalmists experienced deep and troubling difficulties, and felt the absence of God's presence during times of such overwhelming emotion. They too had to dig deep to find the strength to trust God when it seemed too difficult to even fathom doing so. These are not mere platitudes; the psalms of lament are **deep and resounding models for us of how to take hearts weary with grief and sorrow to the LORD.**

This week's homework will trace through **Psalm 5.** Thereafter, the large group session will take a closer look at **Psalm 44.** Other psalms of lament include **Psalms 6, 22, 74, 86 and 142.**

PSALM 5

*For the director of music. For pipes.
A psalm of David.*

¹ Listen to my words, LORD,
consider my lament.

² Hear my cry for help,
my King and my God,
for to you I pray.

³ In the morning, LORD, you hear my
voice;
in the morning I lay my requests
before you
and wait expectantly.

⁴ For you are not a God who is pleased
with wickedness;
with you, evil people are not
welcome.

⁵ The arrogant cannot stand in your
presence.

You hate all who do wrong;

⁶ you destroy those who tell lies.
The bloodthirsty and deceitful you,
LORD, detest.

⁷ But I, by your great love,
can come into your house;
in reverence I bow down
toward your holy temple.

⁸ Lead me, LORD, in your righteousness
because of my enemies—
make your way straight before me.

⁹ Not a word from their mouth can be
trusted;
their heart is filled with malice.

Their throat is an open grave;
with their tongues they tell lies.

¹⁰ Declare them guilty, O God!
Let their intrigues be their downfall.

Banish them for their many sins,
for they have rebelled against you.

¹¹ But let all who take refuge in you be
glad;

let them ever sing for joy.
Spread your protection over them,
that those who love your name may
rejoice in you.

¹² Surely, LORD, you bless the righteous;
you surround them with your favor as
with a shield.

Using one verse or a sentence of your own, what is the main point of this psalm?

How is the cry of lament reflected in the psalm? What emotion or component of the human heart is being expressed?

How does God answer this cry in Jesus?

How does the gospel inform your understanding of this psalm?

Pray this psalm back to God, thinking of a current or past situation when you felt similarly to the psalmist.

Using the ideas at the beginning of the guide or your own, what additional study will you pursue?

PSALM 44

For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. A maskil.

¹We have heard it with our ears, O God;
our ancestors have told us
what you did in their days,
in days long ago.
²With your hand you drove out the nations
and planted our ancestors;
you crushed the peoples
and made our ancestors flourish.
³It was not by their sword that they won the
land,
nor did their arm bring them victory;
it was your right hand, your arm
and the light of your face, for you loved
them.
⁴You are my King and my God,
who decrees victories for Jacob.
⁵Through you we push back our enemies;
through your name we trample our foes.
⁶I put no trust in my bow,
my sword does not bring me victory;
⁷but you give us victory over our enemies,
you put our adversaries to shame.
⁸In God we make our boast all day long,
and we will praise your name forever.
⁹But now you have rejected and humbled
us;
you no longer go out with our armies.
¹⁰You made us retreat before the enemy,
and our adversaries plundered us.
¹¹You gave us up to be devoured like sheep
and have scattered us among the
nations.
¹²You sold your people for a pittance,
gaining nothing from their sale.
¹³You have made us a reproach to our
neighbors,

The scorn and derision of those around
us.
¹⁴You have made us a byword among the
nations;
the peoples shake their heads at us.
¹⁵I live in disgrace all day long,
and my face is covered with shame
¹⁶at the taunts of those who reproach and
revile me,
Because of the enemy, who is bent on
revenge.
¹⁷All this came upon us,
though we had not forgotten you;
we had not been false to your covenant.
¹⁸Our hearts had not turned back;
our feet had not strayed from your path.
¹⁹But you crushed us and made us a haunt
for jackals;
you covered us over with deep
darkness.
²⁰If we had forgotten the name of our God
or spread out our hands to a foreign
god
²¹Would not God have discovered it,
since he knows the secrets of the
heart?
²²Yet for your sake we face death all day
long;
we are considered as sheep to be
slaughtered.
²³Awake, Lord! Why do you sleep?
Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever.
²⁴Why do you hide your face
and forget our misery and oppression?
²⁵We are brought down to the dust,
our bodies cling to the ground.
²⁶Rise up and help us;
rescue us because of your unfailing
love.

CRIES OF LAMENT - PSALM 44 TEACHING NOTES



CRIES OF LAMENT - ADDITIONAL NOTES



Week Four

Cries for Help



Help! is so human a cry that it does not require much explanation. We are limited beings, unable to meet all our own needs. Facing those same limitations, **the psalmists turned to the One who is strong and able to meet all our needs** (2 Cor. 9:8). They cried out for the same sorts of needs we have—physical, relational, emotional, and spiritual. Sometimes they sought help for individual needs, such as in Psalm 41, and other times for national needs, such as in Psalm 106. In doing so, they were reassured that God hears their prayers for help and sustains all who cry out to Him (Psalm 55:16-17, 22).

Psalms seeking God's help often contain aspects of other cries discussed in this study. Psalm 80, for example, contains long sections of lament broken up by a repeated call for God to restore the people of Israel. The psalmists find hope for their circumstances by reflecting on God's character and past deliverance, bringing them to worship.

This week's homework will look at **Psalm 91**, then we will focus on **Psalm 38** in our large group session. Other psalms for further study on this cry include **Psalms 16, 59, 64, 94, and 121**.

PSALM 91

¹Whoever dwells in the shelter of the
Most High
will rest in the shadow of the
Almighty.

²I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge
and fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."

³Surely he will save you
from the fowler's snare
and from the deadly pestilence.

⁴He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find
refuge;

his faithfulness will be your shield
and rampart.

⁵You will not fear the terror of night,
nor the arrow that flies by day.

⁶nor the pestilence that stalks in the
darkness,
nor the plague that destroys at
midday.

⁷A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.

⁸You will only observe with your eyes
and see the punishment of the
wicked.

⁹If you say, "The LORD is my refuge,"
and you make the Most High your
dwelling,

¹⁰No harm will overtake you,
no disaster will come near your tent.

¹¹For he will command his angels
concerning you
to guard you in all your ways;

¹²they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot
against a stone.

¹³You will tread on the lion and the
cobra;
you will trample the great lion and
the serpent.

¹⁴"Because he loves me," says the LORD,
"I will rescue him;
I will protect him, for he
acknowledges my name.

¹⁵He will call on me, and I will answer
him;

I will be with him in trouble,
I will deliver him and honor him.

¹⁶With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation.

Using one verse or a sentence of your own, what is the main point of this psalm?

How is the cry for help reflected in the psalm? What emotion or component of the human heart is being expressed?

How does God answer this cry in Jesus?

How does the gospel inform your understanding of this psalm?

Pray this psalm back to God, thinking of a current or past situation when you felt similarly to the psalmist.

Using the ideas at the beginning of the guide or your own, what additional study will you pursue?

PSALM 38

A psalm of David. A petition.

¹ LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger
or discipline me in your wrath.

² Your arrows have pierced me,
and your hand has come down on
me.

³ Because of your wrath there is no
health in my body;
there is no soundness in my bones
because of my sin.

⁴ My guilt has overwhelmed me
like a burden too heavy to bear.

⁵ My wounds fester and are loathsome
because of my sinful folly.

⁶ I am bowed down and brought very
low;
all day long I go about mourning.

⁷ My back is filled with searing pain;
there is no health in my body.

⁸ I am feeble and utterly crushed;
I groan in anguish of heart.

⁹ All my longings lie open before you,
Lord;
my sighing is not hidden from you.

¹⁰ My heart pounds, my strength fails me;
even the light has gone from my
eyes.

¹¹ My friends and companions
avoid me because of my wounds;
my neighbors stay far away.

¹² Those who want to kill me set their
traps,
those who would harm me talk of my
ruin;
all day long they scheme and lie.

¹³ I am like the deaf, who cannot hear,
like the mute who cannot speak;

¹⁴ I have become like one who does not
hear,
whose mouth can offer no reply.

¹⁵ LORD, I wait for you;
you will answer, Lord my God.

¹⁶ For I said, "Do not let them gloat or
exalt themselves over me
when my feet slip.

¹⁷ For I am about to fall
and my pain is ever with me.

¹⁸ I confess my iniquity;
I am troubled by my sin.

¹⁹ Many have become my enemies
without cause;
Those who hate me without reason
are numerous.

²⁰ Those who repay my good with evil
lodge accusations against me,
Though I seek only to do what is
good.

²¹ LORD, do not forsake me;
do not be far from me, my God.

²² Come quickly to help me,
my Lord and my Savior.

CRIES FOR HELP - PSALM 38 TEACHING NOTES



CRIES FOR HELP - ADDITIONAL NOTES





Week Five

Cries for Justice

Cries for justice ask God to make right what is very, very wrong. These are also called *imprecatory psalms*, which literally means “to invoke disaster upon.” They often contain curses or expressed desire for misfortune to befall one’s enemies. As we read these psalms, it is critical to keep in mind that the enemies are not meant to be understood as those whom we dislike or even people who have legitimately wronged us. **“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12).** The enemies in the psalms are those who stand against God, those who oppose His purposes and embrace open rebellion against Him.

So should a Christian pray imprecatory psalms? Well, we can certainly join the psalmists in desiring that God’s justice would come and that wickedness would be done away with once and for all. As we pray, it is beneficial to bear in mind that a call for God’s justice applies across the board—we do not get to pick and choose who His justice falls upon, including ourselves (Malachi 2:17-3:5). **The only protection against the just wrath of God is to be found in Christ when judgment day comes.** For this reason, imprecatory psalms often include calls for repentance, among the enemies and within oneself. For God will not despise a broken and contrite heart (Psalm 51:17).

This week’s homework will trace through **Psalm 94**. In the large group session, we will tackle **Psalm 137**, which contains very disturbing imagery. However, rather than running from a difficult passage, we will face it head-on and endeavor to better understand why God would include it in His Word. Other imprecatory psalms include **Psalms 35, 59, 69, and 109**.

PSALM 94

¹ The LORD is a God who avenges.
O God who avenges, shine forth.
² Rise up, Judge of the earth;
pay back to the proud what they
deserve.
³ How long, LORD, will the wicked,
how long will the wicked be jubilant?

⁴ They pour out arrogant words;
all the evildoers are full of boasting.
⁵ They crush your people, LORD,
they oppress your inheritance.
⁶ They slay the widow and the foreigner;
they murder the fatherless.
⁷ They say, "The LORD does not see;
The God of Jacob takes no notice."

⁸ Take notice, you senseless ones
among the people;
you fools, when will you become
wise?
⁹ Does he who fashioned the ear not
hear?
Does he who formed the eye not
see?
¹⁰ Does he who disciplines nations not
punish?
Does he who teaches mankind lack
knowledge?
¹¹ The LORD knows all human plans;
he knows they are futile.

¹² Blessed is the one you discipline,
LORD,
The one you teach from your law;

¹³ you grant them relief from days of
trouble,
till a pit is dug for the wicked.
¹⁴ For the LORD will not reject his people;
he will never forsake his inheritance.
¹⁵ Judgment will again be founded on
righteousness,
and all the upright in heart will follow
it.

¹⁶ Who will rise up for me against the
wicked?
Who will take a stand for me against
evildoers?
¹⁷ Unless the Lord had given me help,
I would soon have dwelt in the
silence of death.
¹⁸ When I said, "My foot is slipping,"
your unfailing love, LORD, supported
me.
¹⁹ When anxiety was great within me,
your consolation brought me joy.

²⁰ Can a corrupt throne be allied with
you—
a throne that brings on misery by its
decrees?
²¹ The wicked band together against the
righteous
and condemn the innocent to death.
²² But the LORD has become my fortress,
and my God the rock in whom I take
refuge.
²³ He will repay them for their sins
and destroy them for their
wickedness;
the LORD our God will destroy them.

Using one verse or a sentence of your own, what is the main point of this psalm?

How is the cry for justice reflected in the psalm? What emotion or component of the human heart is being expressed?

How does God answer this cry in Jesus?

How does the gospel inform your understanding of this psalm?

Pray this psalm back to God, thinking of a current or past situation when you felt similarly to the psalmist.

Using the ideas at the beginning of the guide or your own, what additional study will you pursue?

Please note that this psalm addresses the truly frightening depth of depravity in the human condition, using disturbing imagery to do so. We include it as part of this study because we believe all Scripture has God as its source and is useful for us as we grow in Christ (2 Timothy 3:16-17), and that learning how to handle difficult texts is part of maturing in Christian faith. We will be approaching this psalm with care, desiring to better understand the context from which it arose and God’s response to this cry for justice. However, because of the graphic nature of the contents, we leave it to your discretion whether you engage with Psalm 137 at this exact time.

PSALM 137

¹By the rivers of Babylon we sat and
wept

when we remembered Zion.

²There on the poplars
we hung our harps,

³for there our captors asked us for
songs,

our tormentors demanded songs of
joy;

they said, “Sing us one of the songs
of Zion!”

⁴How can we sing the songs of the LORD
while in a foreign land?

⁵If I forget you, Jerusalem,
may my right hand forget its skill.

⁶May my tongue cling to the roof of my
mouth

if I do not remember you,
if I do not consider Jerusalem
my highest joy.

⁷Remember, LORD, what the Edomites
did

on the day Jerusalem fell.

“Tear it down,” they cried,
“tear it down to its foundations!”

⁸Daughter Babylon, doomed to
destruction,
happy is the one who repays you
according to what you have done to
us.

⁹Happy is the one who seizes your
infants
and dashes them against the rocks.

CRIES FOR JUSTICE - PSALM 137 TEACHING NOTES



CRIES FOR JUSTICE - ADDITIONAL NOTES



Week Six

Cries for a Savior



Savior psalms speak most directly about the coming of Jesus Christ, either through prophecy or foreshadow. Messiah is a Hebrew term that means “Anointed One.” It is essentially equivalent to the Greek title “Christ,” found in the New Testament.

Messianic psalms point us to the coming of Christ by **describing what the Messiah would be like and what he would do**. Psalm 2, for example, details that the nations would rise against the Messiah—but would not ultimately prevail, and Paul writes in Acts 4:24-28 that this prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Christ’s crucifixion.

Royal psalms also point us to the coming of Christ as they focus on King David and his descendants. They serve as a shadow that points us to the substance of Jesus, **reflecting ideals that David and some of his descendants aspired to but only King Jesus can fully bring about**. Psalm 72 is an example of this, where David anticipates a life of peace and flourishing under the eternal reign of his descendent. David’s son, the initial subject of the poem, achieved some of what is laid out, but ultimately fell short of the psalm’s vision.

This week’s homework will look at **Psalm 118**, and then we will focus on **Psalm 132** in our large group session. Other psalms for further study on this cry include **Psalms 2, 72, 89, and 110**.

PSALM 118

¹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.

² Let Israel say:
“His love endures forever.”

³ Let the house of Aaron say:
“His love endures forever.”

⁴ Let those who fear the LORD say:
“His love endures forever.”

⁵ When hard pressed, I cried to the LORD;
he brought me into a spacious place.

⁶ The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid.
What can mere mortals do to me?

⁷ The LORD is with me; he is my helper.
I look in triumph on my enemies.

⁸ It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to trust in humans.

⁹ It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to trust in princes.

¹⁰ All the nations surrounded me,
but in the name of the LORD I cut them
down.

¹¹ They surrounded me on every side,
but in the name of the LORD I cut them
down.

¹² They swarmed around me like bees,
but they were consumed as quickly as
burning thorns;
In the name of the LORD I cut them
down.

¹³ I was pushed back and about to fall,
But the LORD helped me.

¹⁴ The LORD is my strength and my defense;
He has become my salvation.

¹⁵ Shouts of joy and victory
Resound in the tents of the righteous:
“The LORD’s right hand has done mighty
things!

¹⁶ The LORD’s right hand is lifted high;
The LORD’s right hand has done mighty
things!”

¹⁷ I will not die but live,
and I will proclaim what the LORD has
done.

¹⁸ The LORD has chastened me severely,
but he has not given me over the death.

¹⁹ Open for me the gates of the righteous;
I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.

²⁰ This is the gate of the LORD
through which the righteous may enter.

²¹ I will give you thanks, for you answered
me;
you have become my salvation.

²² The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;

²³ the LORD has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.

²⁴ The LORD has done it this very day;
Let us rejoice today and be glad.

²⁵ LORD, save us!
LORD, grant us success!

²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of
the LORD.

From the house of the LORD we bless
you.

²⁷ The LORD is God,
and he has made his light shine on us.
With boughs in hand, join in the festal
procession
up to the horns of the altar.

²⁸ You are my God, and I will praise you;
you are my God, and I will exalt you.

²⁹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.

Using one verse or a sentence of your own, what is the main point of this psalm?

How is the cry for a Savior reflected in the psalm? What emotion or component of the human heart is being expressed?

How does God answer this cry in Jesus?

How does the gospel inform your understanding of this psalm?

Pray this psalm back to God, thinking of a current or past situation when you felt similarly to the psalmist.

Using the ideas at the beginning of the guide or your own, what additional study will you pursue?

PSALM 132

A song of ascents.

¹ LORD, remember David
and all his self-denial.

² He swore an oath to the LORD;
he made a vow to the Mighty One of
Jacob:

³ “I will not enter my house
or go to my bed,

⁴ I will allow no sleep to my eyes
or slumber to my eyelids,

⁵ till I find a place for the LORD,
a dwelling for the Mighty One of
Jacob.”

⁶ We heard it in Ephrathah,
we came upon it in the fields of Jaar:

⁷ “Let us go to his dwelling place,
let us worship at his footstool, saying,

⁸ ‘Arise, LORD, and come to your resting
place,
you and the ark of your might.

⁹ May your priests be clothed with your
righteousness;
may your faithful people sing for
joy.”

¹⁰ For the sake of your servant David,
do not reject your anointed one.

¹¹ The LORD swore an oath to David,
a sure oath he will not revoke:

“One of your own descendants
I will place on your throne.

¹² If your sons keep my covenant
and the statutes I teach them,
then their sons will sit
on your throne for ever and ever.”

¹³ For the LORD has chosen Zion,
he has desired it for his dwelling,
saying,

¹⁴ “This is my resting place for ever and
ever;
here I will sit enthroned, for I have
desired it.

¹⁵ I will bless her with her abundant
provisions;
her poor I will satisfy with food.

¹⁶ I will clothe her priests with salvation,
and her faithful people will ever sing
for joy.

¹⁷ “Here I will make a horn grow for David
and set up a lamp for my anointed
one.

¹⁸ I will clothe his enemies with shame,
but his head will be adorned with a
radiant crown.”

CRIES FOR A SAVIOR - PSALM 132 TEACHING NOTES



CRIES FOR A SAVIOR - ADDITIONAL NOTES





Final Reflection

Cries for Forgiveness

Honest and open repentance and seeking for forgiveness is the major task undertaken in the *penitential psalms*, such as Psalm 6, 32, 38, 102, and 130, but the most well known one of these is Psalm 51. This is printed on the next page for one last personal reflection for you to complete on your own.

As we will not be meeting to discuss it, **let this one get a little more personal**. Most of us are dealing with much more mundane sin than David's, but we all need to seek God's forgiveness. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind an area where you need to repent. As the psalm models, sit in lament for a time, grieving the seriousness of your sin. Worship God for his character of mercy and faithfulness, as displayed in the person of Jesus. Reflect on how this forgiveness is possible because of the work and person of Jesus Christ. **Praise God for his deliverance!**

PSALM 51

For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.

² Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.

⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.

⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother
conceived me.

⁶ Yet you desired faithfulness even in the
womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret
place.

⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be
clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than
snow.

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed
rejoice.

⁹ Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within
me.

¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to
sustain me.

¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your
ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.

¹⁴ Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed,
O God,
you who are God my Savior,
and my tongue will sing of your
righteousness.

¹⁵ Open my lips, Lord,
and my mouth will declare your
praise.

¹⁶ You do not delight in sacrifice, or I
would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt
offerings.

¹⁷ My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise.

¹⁸ May it please you to prosper Zion,
to build up the walls of Jerusalem.

¹⁹ Then you will delight in the sacrifices of
the righteous,
in burnt offerings offered whole;
then bulls will be offered on your
altar.

Using one verse or a sentence of your own, what is the main point of this psalm?

How is the cry for forgiveness reflected in the psalm? What emotion or component of the human heart is being expressed?

How does God answer this cry in Jesus?

How does the gospel inform your understanding of this psalm?

Pray this psalm back to God, thinking of a current or past situation when you felt similarly to the psalmist.

Using the ideas at the beginning of the guide or your own, what additional study will you pursue?

CRIES FOR FORGIVENESS - NOTES

