

Getting Started

Overview of the Week:

Our theme for the week is dwelling with God in prayer. When we study the idea of prayer, there truly is no better place to begin than the Lord's Prayer. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches His disciples how to pray. The well-known prayer acronym "ACTS" was developed based on Jesus's format of what to pray in the Lord's Prayer and is a helpful tool to use. A is for adoration, C is for confession, T is for thanksgiving, and S is for supplication. Praying in this order and with these tenets is absolutely biblical and encouraged. To dive more deeply into how to pray, we are going to take a look at how the saints prayed in Psalms.

How Do I Prepare?

Many refer to Psalms as the prayer book of the Bible, so there is much to glean from this book. This week, we're going to look at several psalms that will help us better understand how to develop strong prayer lives. We will study Psalm 25, 103, 51, and 121 this week. As always, on day 5, you will have the opportunity to reflect on the studies of the week and choose one of those passages to dig into more deeply for self and communal application.

Memory Verse of the Week:

"As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments. The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all" (Psalm 103:15-19) On the next page, write or "Scripture doodle" your memory verse.

Prayer of the Week:

On the next page, write out a prayer to the Lord, praising Him for who He is and asking Him to help us grow in intimate knowledge of Him through prayer using His Word. Use Psalm 103 to guide you as you write this prayer.

Songs of the Week:

"10,000 Reasons," Matt Redman; "Graves into Gardens," Elevation Worship; "God Be Merciful to Me," Keith & Kristyn Getty; "You and I," Shane and Shane; "Learning to Need You" Justin McRoberts

Link to playlist: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3BEh5j9yeffgIo4EbmvRqW

Week Seven Memory Verse:

Week Seven Prayer:

Day One: Developing Intimate Friendship with God through Prayer

1. Pray

Before we begin reading and examining God's Word, let's ask the Lord to lead us in the study of His Word.

2. Examine

As we begin our study on how to dwell with God in prayer, we'll begin with Psalm 25. Read Psalm 25 in its entirety.

¹ To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.
² O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me.
³ Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

⁴ Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths.
⁵ Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.

⁶ Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

⁷ Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!

⁸ Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
⁹ He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.
¹⁰ All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies. ¹¹ For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great.

¹² Who is the man who fears the LORD? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.

¹³ His soul shall abide in well-being, and his offspring shall inherit the land.
¹⁴ The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.

¹⁵ My eyes are ever toward the LORD, for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

¹⁶ Turn to me and be gracious to me,
for I am lonely and afflicted.
¹⁷ The troubles of my heart are enlarged;
bring me out of my distresses.
¹⁸ Consider my affliction and my trouble,
and forgive all my sins.

¹⁹ Consider how many are my foes,
and with what violent hatred they hate me.
²⁰ Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me!
Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.

²¹ May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you.

²² Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles. (ESV)

The Context:

Psalm 25, a psalm of David, is written as an acrostic, showing us that this psalm was most likely intended to be memorized and called to mind often. In this psalm, David displays the love and affection he has for God and also the deep trust he has for Him based on their intimate and authentic relationship.

David begins this psalm by declaring his trust in the Lord. It is clear here that David has an established relationship with the Lord. He trusts Him completely and, because of this trust, he chooses to bare his soul to his Maker. Not only is he willing to be intimate before the Lord, but he also is willing to be vulnerable enough to request the Lord's deliverance from shame and trouble brought on by his enemies.

In verses 4 and 5, David makes plain that he sees himself as humble before God. He is the one who needs to learn from God, not the other way around. David's humility opens himself up to truly growing not only in wisdom from God but into a deeper relationship with Him also. He's painting a picture of a close, mentoring relationship in which God daily leads him in truth as he goes throughout his daily activities. They are together in this picture, dwelling with one another "all the day long" (verse 5). David is not merely asking God to repeat His commandments or to remind Him of a list of rules. Rather, David wants to know the ways, the paths of God, something that must be learned by journeying through life together. This section calls to mind Psalm 23, just 2 psalms before this one, when David mentions God leading him beside still waters. Again, God is with David throughout his journey of life and guides him as he goes.

David continues his plea for deliverance in verses 6-7. As he calls out to God for help, he also reminds himself of God's character, referring to Him as merciful, loving, and good. He prays these attributes back to God, not to remind God that He is merciful and full of steadfast love, but to remind himself and encourage himself with truths from God's Word. These reminders then lead David into a moment of praise and thanksgiving before the Lord in verses 8-10. He praises God for how He has been faithful not just to David but to all of God's children who keep His covenant. After this period of praising God, David abruptly shifts his prayer and calls out to God for forgiveness of his sins, crying out that he is guilty before the Lord. He asks God to forgive him not for his own sake but for the sake of God's Holy Name.

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In verses 12-15, David confidently proclaims the confidence he has in the Lord to teach, guide, and relate with those who fear Him. He has faith that God will answer his prayer for wisdom, instruction, and guidance. He believes this because he understands that God's faithfulness is not dependent upon David but upon God's being faithful to Himself, to His Name, as David pointed out in verse 11. He comments that God offers friendship to those who fear Him, to those who will humble themselves and accept a relationship with Him according to God's terms, not man's.

David concludes his prayer to God by once again calling out to the Lord for deliverance, both for himself as well as for all of Israel. He is even more vulnerable and authentic in his prayer in this portion of the psalm, telling the Lord of his loneliness and his pain. He recognizes that he is sinful and in need of forgiveness, and he asks God, as His Father, His Maker, His Friend, to hear him and to free him of his troubles. He does so confidently, knowing that God does truly hear Him and that God, who has always been faithful, cannot be anything but.

Your Turn to Dig In

1. Read through the psalm in its entirety again, taking note of the intimate tone. What specific verses show the intimate friendship between David and God?

2. Re-read verses 4-5. Note how David refers to His time with the Lord as a continual act, and notice how he patiently waits for the Lord. What principles does this teach us about prayer?

3. Humility and vulnerability are key themes in this psalm. How are these characteristics related to prayer, and why are they essential for a rich prayer life?

4. Re-read verses 6-10, paying attention to how David praises the Lord in the midst of his prayer for deliverance. What aspects of his prayer lead to praise, and why?

5. In verse 11, David stops mid prayer and asks God for forgiveness. Consider the immediate context of this verse. What do you think led him to stop and ask God for forgiveness at this point in the psalm?

6. Re-read verses 20-21. What connection do David's integrity and uprightness have with David's confidence in going before God in prayer?

Reflection and Application

Friends are some of God's greatest blessings. I am beyond thankful for the friends God has placed in my life. As wonderful as my friends are, however, not one holds a candle to the friendship that is available with the Living, True God. Psalm 25 is one of my favorite psalms because of the glimpse it gives us of the sweet, intimate relationship David had with God Himself. I pray that we all can continually grow in our relationship with our Father and Friend so that we, too, can confidently stand before His throne in prayer.

1. Tim Keller, when asked to teach on prayer in the Psalms, chose to use Psalm 25:14 as his primary passage. He said that this verse shows the intimate friendship found between God and His children because of the way it shows the sweet communion and shared "secrets" between them. Throughout his teaching on the passage, Keller demonstrates how in friendship, two people share their thoughts and lives with one another, pointing out the two-sided nature of friendly communication. This verse demonstrates that as we share with God in prayer, He also reveals more of Himself and His covenant to us. Reflect on what your prayers with God are currently like. Are you vulnerable and authentic when you pray before the Lord? Do you pray His Word so that you grow in knowledge and truth regarding God and His Word as you pray? How would you like to see your prayer life grow in these areas?

2. Spend some time reflecting on your relationship with God. Do you see Him as a friend? Why or why not? How can you grow in this area if you don't feel a close, intimate, kindred spirit between yourself and God? How can you encourage others towards this intimacy if you do?

Day Two: Knowing God More Deeply through Praying His Word

1. Pray

Before we begin reading and examining God's Word, let's ask the Lord to lead us in the study of His Word.

2. Examine

Yesterday, we talked about developing a friendship with God through prayer. Today, we'll learn about how we can better know Him relationally through prayer using His Word. To do this, we'll return to Psalm 103.

¹ Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!

² Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

³ who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,

⁴ who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, ⁵ who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

⁶ The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.

⁷ He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.

⁸ The LORD is merciful and gracious,

slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. ⁹ He will not always hide, nor will he keep his anger forever.

¹⁰ He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. mighty ones who do his word, obeying

^{Π} For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him:

¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

¹³As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

¹⁴ For he knows our frame: he remembers that we are dust.

¹⁵ As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field: ¹⁶ for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. ¹⁷ But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children. ¹⁸ to those who akeep his covenant and remember to do his commandments. ¹⁹ The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.

²⁰ Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you the voice of his word!

²¹ Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers. who do his will!

²² Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul! (ESV)

The Context:

Developing a friendship with someone involves getting to know them more fully and more deeply. To know God more intimately, we must spend time meditating upon His Word and praying it back to Him. Psalm 103 is one of the most beautiful psalms in the Psalter to begin this practice with.

This psalm of David doesn't have a clear direct context, but Charles Spurgeon hypothesizes that it was likely written in the latter years of David's life: "We should attribute it to his later years when he had a higher sense of the preciousness of pardon, because a keener sense of sin, than in his younger days. His clear sense of the frailty of life indicates his weaker years, as also does the very fulness of his praiseful gratitude." Regardless of the exact time period in which this psalm was written, it is clear that this psalm indicates deep, intimate knowledge of and relationship with God. It is a psalm of pure praise that uplifts David's God. Spending time with God in adoration and praise is one of the most important aspects of our prayer time but can often be difficult to do. Psalm 103 serves as an excellent example and guide.

In this psalm, David lists reason after reason to bless God. The meaning of "bless the Lord" in this passage means that David is worshipping and showing honor to God, not that he as a man is giving a blessing to God. David uses the word "bless" to show the adoration that he has for God and to give Him the honor and reverence that this majestic, glorious God deserves.

David begins his elevated hymn of praise by first singing of the personal benefits he has received from the Lord in verses 1-5. He then expands his view and praises God for all He has done not only for David but for all of His people in verses 6-19. In verses 20-22, David closes the psalm with a call to action for his hearers/readers: everyone should join together in praise to the Almighty God.

David opens the psalm by stirring up his soul and encouraging himself towards praise and adoration towards God. Charles Spurgeon explains David's situation well: "Our very life and essential self should be engrossed with this delightful service, and each one of us should arouse his own heart to the engagement. Let others forbear if they can: 'Bless the Lord, O MY soul.' Let others murmur, but do thou *bless*. Let others bless themselves and their idols, but do thou bless the LORD. Let others use only their tongues, but as for me I will cry, 'Bless the Lord, O my *soul.*'' David chooses to praise and adore God regardless of what others around him are doing, and he musters up the fullest expression of praise that he can give, from the depths of his soul.

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As David praises God for his personal benefits, he also praises God for his redemptive history. He shows the immutability of God and His steadfast love and faithfulness as he recalls example after example of God being true to His character not only to David but to all of His children. Verses 6-12 should be especially encouraging to modern-day believers because they demonstrate that God isn't only faithful to David or to those he's placed in leadership. He's faithful to all who are covenant believers with Him, even those who mumble and complain against Him, like the Israelites did in the wilderness. His patience and steadfast love, in turn, cause Him to continue to keep His covenant, which was fulfilled in the coming of His Son, Jesus Christ. Just as God was steadfastly faithful to the Israelites and to David, He remained faithful to bring about His covenant plan to save all humanity from sin and shame through the person and work of Christ. Because of Christ's sacrifice, all of God's children have access to the forgiveness of sins, making our sins as far from us as the east is from the west. God alone has been faithful from eternity past into the present and will be faithful into eternity future. For this reason alone, He deserves to be praised from the depths of our soul.

In verses 13-19, David contrasts God's characteristics and ways with those of man. He does this to show that there truly is no one like the Lord our God. He is unique not just for uniqueness' sake, though. God is unique in that He is higher, nobler, kinder, more loving, more faithful, and more holy than any person who exists, has ever existed, or will exist. God is eternal, and so are His precepts. David points out, though, how God in His kindness and steadfast love, bends down to sinful, temporal humanity and makes Himself known to us. What's more, God allows His children to experience His goodness and love, extending His righteousness to those of us who will accept it according to His covenant.

Because of God's holiness, love, and faithfulness, He deserves to be praised not just by David but by all. Because He extends Himself, His righteousness, and His future eternality to His children, He deserves even more praise! We should, as David does in verses 20-22, praise God with every facet of our being and should call on others to do the same.

Your Turn to Dig In

1. Note the structure of the psalm. Why do you think David begins by praising God for the benefits he has experienced personally before then going on to praise Him for what He has done for all of His children? Why do you think the section that praises God for His encompassing works is longer and then leads into a call for others to join in with praise?

2. Read verses 1-5. What specific benefits of God does David mention that he himself has experienced? Which of these benefits have you personally experienced?

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3. Read verses 6-10, keeping in mind the experience of the Israelites being delivered from Egypt and their time in the wilderness. Write down a time when God brought justice for the oppressed, revealed Himself to Moses (and, therefore to all of Israel), was merciful and gracious, diffused his anger, and didn't deal with the Israelites according to their sins. If you are not as familiar with the Old Testament, call someone in your group and ask them where to find this information in Scripture.

4. Read verses 13-19. Write down the various attributes of God mentioned in this section. Then, contrast these attributes with the common man. How do we fall short of who God is?

5. Re-read verse 22. Which of God's works does this verse say are worthy of praise? If we are to praise God for all of His works, what does this teach us about the connection between Scripture reading and prayer?

Reflection and Application

Oh that my spirit and soul would reflect David's in this psalm! All too often, it is apathetic, half-hearted, or even cold towards the Lord. My prayer for you, as it is for me, is that we would grow in our affection towards the Lord through a deeper study of His Word and through more focused time in prayer. I encourage you to do all that you can to stir up your affections for God. Do not expect that this affection will come naturally; it will not, even though it should. Do as David did, and recall God's goodness, faithfulness, and love. Read the stories of the Old Testament that show His power and majesty. Read the New Testament to see His covenant fulfilled and to see God's incarnation in Jesus Christ, walking among His people and sacrificing Himself for us. Guard against complacency and coldness by spending daily time in prayer and praise to our Father and King.

1. Re-read verses 1 and 2. Compare David's praising of God from the very depths of his soul to your most recent time of praise before the Lord. If you, like me, struggle with developing this deep sense of awe and reverence on a regular basis, I encourage you to spend more time using psalms like this one to pray through. Spend some focused time right now reflecting on the truths about God as shown in Psalm 103. Then, encourage your soul and spirit towards a time of adoration and praise to the Lord. Journal down below on how this time with the Lord went.

2. Refer back to verses 1-5 and to your answer in question 2 of the previous section. Spend time writing out a praise to God for the benefits of His that you have experienced.

Day Three: Praying Prayers of Confession and Repentance

1. Pray

Before we begin reading and examining God's Word, let's ask the Lord to lead us in the study of His Word.

2. Examine

Today, we will read and examine Psalm 51 together to learn more about confessing our sins towards the Lord, repenting of them, and restoring our relationship with Him.

¹Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

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

⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.
⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice.
⁹ Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.
¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence, and take not qyour Holy Spirit from me.
¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will rreturn to you.

¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.

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

¹⁶ For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

¹⁸ Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
build up the walls of Jerusalem;
¹⁹ then will you delight in aright sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

The Context:

Psalm 51 is one of the most well-known and well-loved psalms of David. He wrote it after he had repented of his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah. After his bout with sin, Nathan the prophet came and confronted David. David's response was repentance, and the result of that repentance was this psalm.

David begins his psalm by crying out to God for mercy. He knows he is in sin and, therefore, does not ask God to be merciful due to any act of his own. Rather, David asks God to be merciful because of who God is. He reminds himself of the goodness of God and of God's loving nature as he begins his plea for forgiveness and mercy. David sees himself as unclean before the Lord and asks God to cleanse and restore him. He is eaten up with thoughts of his sin and is overcome with grief and shame, as is evident in verse 3. David Guzik comments, "David didn't say, 'My punishment is ever before me," or "My consequences are ever before me.' What bothered him was his sin. Many grieve over the consequences of sin, but few over sin itself." It is evident here that David is experiencing godly sorrow, not worldly sorrow.

In verse 5, David expresses the depth and breadth of his sin, showing that though these sins of adultery and murder are what he is currently overwhelmed by, they are not his only sins. He acknowledges that he, like all of us, was born sinful and that because of this sin, he has been separated from God and deserving of eternal judgment were it not for the grace and mercy of God.

Just as David understands that sin, especially unconfessed, unrepentant sin, separates him from a holy God, he knows that it is God alone who can make him clean again and restore their relationship. In verses 7 and 8, he confidently asks God to cleanse him of his sins and to make him clean. He knows that God will be faithful and answer this plea, for God desires that all should be free from sin. He recognizes that the agony he has been feeling due to being in unrepentant sin is part of God's discipline and asks God to turn this godly sorrow from mourning into rejoicing.

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Verses 9-12 are some of the most well known in the psalms. Here, we see David's heartfelt plea for forgiveness. He asks God to cleanse him and to renew a right spirit within him. He recognizes that the sins he has committed have caused not only external turmoil but also internal distress. In addition, David recognizes that he hasn't been experiencing the same intimacy with God during this period of unconfessed, unrepentant sin. He asks God to not only restore his emotions and mindset but also to restore the relationship that he and God had once experienced. He wants to be in God's presence, dwelling with him as he had in the past, remembering the joy that he has found there. David, like New Testament believers, had experienced the joy of being saved through Christ. Though David did not have the full details of what Christ would come and do, he still was saved through faith in the Messiah who was to come. Saving faith always has with it the fruit of joy, and David here requests that God restore to him a joyful heart.

Verses 13-15 are crucial ones for us to take notice of. David's repentance is not merely self focused. He understands that he has a responsibility to teach others the ways of God and knows he cannot do this fully without first repenting and seeking God's forgiveness. As king, David was responsible for leading Israel in the way of God. But even as an everyday believer, David still had the responsibility, as we all do, of coming alongside fellow believers and teaching them how to walk with God. He commits to singing praise to God for bringing him out of his difficult situation and for cleansing him of his sins.

David closes out his psalm discussing sacrifices and offerings, stating that what God most desires of His children is the sacrifice of a broken spirit and contrite heart. David explains that God desires righteous living and humble, repentant spirits. While we have unclean hearts due to unrepentant sin, praise and thanksgiving to God fall short. Once we have confessed and repented of our sin, He very much desires that we then come to Him and lift up prayers of praise and thanksgiving.

Your Turn to Dig In

1. Read 2 Samuel 11 and 12 to get a better understanding of the context of this psalm. Describe David's sins and the results of them.

2. In verse 4, David comments that he has sinned against God and God alone. What does he mean by this, and what is the significance of this statement? 3. Read Hebrews 12:6-11. What does this passage teach about discipline? How does that align with Psalm 51?

4. In verse 12, David asks God to restore the joy of his salvation to him. What does he mean by this, and why does he need God to restore it?

5. Read verses 16-19. Why does God require repentance and confession prior to receiving sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise from His children?

Reflection and Application

David's prayer of confession and repentance reveals his vulnerable spirit before the Lord and his humble attitude. He sees his sin as serious and knows that there is only one solution for it: forgiveness from God Himself. He recognizes that though he certainly did sin against Bathsheba, Uriah, and others, he sinned first and foremost against God. Rather than turning away from God and running from his sin, David faces it head on (after being confronted by Nathan) and seeks God's help in overcoming it. I pray that this study has shown the seriousness of sin and our great need for repenting of it. I hope that David's prayer will serve as an example in our lives for how to pray and ask God to cleanse us of sin so that we can restore our relationship with Him and better lead others in His way.

1. Read Psalm 51:3-4, and read 2 Corinthians 7:10. How is it clear that David is experiencing godly sorrow rather than worldly sorrow? Reflect on your response to sin in your life. Think of times when you've experienced worldly sorrow and times when you've experienced godly sorrow. Is there any current unconfessed sin in your life that you are not repentant of? Ask God to reveal the depths of your heart to you and to help you walk in repentance of any known or unknown sins.

2. We've all heard the analogy of the oxygen mask on an airplane: the one where they teach mental health or self care saying that before we are able to help someone else, we must first put on our own oxygen mask. This concept applies physically because if one runs out of oxygen, he or she won't have much luck helping someone else secure oxygen. Spiritually, this concept also has application. While God can and does use people at all places in their spiritual walks, when it comes to teaching and leading others spiritually, we need to keep ourselves in a right relationship with God for our own well beings but also for the well being of others. Take some time now and ask the Lord to open doors of opportunity for you to pour into the spiritual lives of others. Ask God to grow you in knowledge and relationship with Him so that you are able to do so deeply and richly. Write down that prayer below if you choose.

Day Four: Praying with a Humble Spirit

1. Pray

Before we begin reading and examining God's Word, let's ask the Lord to lead us in the study of His Word.

2. Examine

We have spent several days studying and practicing praying through the psalms. Today, let's turn our attention to Psalm 131. Read the psalm in its entirety before we look at it more closely together.

¹O LORD, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. ² But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me.

³ O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forevermore. (ESV)

The Context:

Psalm 131, another psalm of David, is one of the shortest psalms in the Psalter, consisting of only 3 verses. (Psalm 117 is the shortest, with only 2 verses). Psalm 131 is a psalm of ascent, meaning it is one of the psalms that was used to prepare peoples' hearts for worship, particularly those who were traveling into Jerusalem to visit the temple for a feast or festival. Charles Spurgeon remarks regarding this psalm: "It is one of the shortest Psalms to read, but one of the longest to learn. It speaks of a young child, but it contains the experience of a man in Christ." I chose to include this psalm as the last one of the week since it is the most difficult to practice of them all yet perhaps the most important. Psalm 131 is one of genuine humility.

David begins this psalm by presenting himself as humble before God. Here, he is rejecting the pride that he (like all of us) could so easily fall into. He pushes it away and focuses on God Himself, choosing to bow before Him, lowly and humble. One does not simply come before God with a humble spirit; humility is not something that comes naturally. So, it is evident that prior to writing this psalm, David had spent time bringing himself, through prayer and likely a confession and repentance of sin, to a place of humility. Spurgeon remarks on the significance of this type of posture before the Lord saying how remarkable it is for someone to be able to search himself thoroughly and to say that he or she is "neither proud in his opinion of himself, contemptuous to others, nor self righteous before the Lord; neither boastful of the past, proud of the present, nor ambitious for the future."

David comes before the Lord focused on Him and His ways, not on his own personal concerns. David says that he doesn't occupy himself with things that are "too great or marvelous" for him, meaning that he doesn't come to God making demands for the mysteries of the universe or things unexplained to be made clear to him. Rather, he comes to God to accept whatever it is God is willing to bestow to him. He comes to experience God and to receive whatever nourishment God sees fit in giving him. This shows David's trust in the Lord to love and care for him but also David's trust that God's desires for David are better than those David has for himself. He is acknowledging that he doesn't have the right requests to bring before God, that he doesn't even truly know his needs, and that he needs God to reveal even that to him.

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David reinforces this theme of humility and neediness by drawing a picture of a child being quieted after being weaned from its mother. David Guzik explains, "A child not-yet weaned embraces his mother with the thought of food and immediate satisfaction. A weaned child embraces his mother out of a desire for love, closeness, and companionship. Such was David's humble desire to draw near to God." A child goes to its mother for nourishment, love, companionship, protection, and so much more. We should come to God for the same and should understand in the same way that He is in control and we are not. He is wiser than we are or could be. And just as there are many things that parents understand that children do not, there are always going to be aspects of the world and of God Himself that we are unable to grasp or that God doesn't choose to reveal to us. In times of uncertainty, it is important that rather than wrestling with these issues constantly in our minds, hearts, and lives, we should instead quiet our souls before the Lord and allow Him to reveal things in His timing and to provide and protect in His timing, as well.

David closes the psalm by encouraging Israel to hope in the Lord now and forevermore. He wants the people of Israel (and all of God's children) to understand the greatness of God, to see Him as majestic, wonderful, powerful, and sovereign. David understands that when we humble ourselves, we are able to see God more clearly, and the more clearly we see God, the more peace and certainty we can have both in the present and in the future.

Your Turn to Dig In

1. This psalm is a psalm both of humility and contentment. How are the concepts of humility and contentment related?

2. David tells the Lord that his heart and eyes are not lifted up and that he's not occupying himself with things that are too "marvelous" for him. Why is it problematic when we try to occupy ourselves with things that are beyond our control or that are too great for us?

3. Why do you think David uses the image of a mother with an infant in this psalm?

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4. How do a humble and quiet spirit lead us to hope more in God?

5. Read Luke 10:38-42, the story of Mary and Martha. Which of these individuals do you think most reflects the spirit David has in Psalm 131? Why? What connections do you see between that story and this psalm?

Reflection and Application

Psalm 131 is one of the most humbling psalms for me to read because it shows me how much pride I have and how much humility I lack. All too often, I desire to be independent and spend so much time spinning my wheels trying to do things for God when He always desires first and foremost that I know and honor Him in my heart before I attempt to do so with my actions. It is difficult for us to see ourselves as needy children before God, especially when things are going well in our lives. That is one reason this psalm is such a good reminder that God is God and we are not. The mysteries and problems of the world lie on his shoulders, not ours. I hope that reading and thinking through this psalm has encouraged your prayers to be more focused on God's ultimate desires and kingdom rather than your own.

1. What circumstances in your life make it difficult for your soul to be quiet and calm before the Lord? Why?

2. Reflect on the current state of your heart and soul. Are you humble and content before the Lord? Why or why not? How can Psalm 131 help you to grow in contentment and humility?

Day Five: Week Seven Debrief & PERCH Study

This week, we have scratched the surface of what prayer in the Psalms looks like. The Psalter, as the prayer book of the Bible, is rich with teaching on the subject and has a wide breadth of examples to follow. The psalms we studied this week are equally rich and have even more depths to discover. I hope that your prayer life has deepened this week, and I hope it continues to do so. As you think through which psalm to choose this week, I encourage you to spend time asking the Lord to guide your choice. Pray that He would reveal to you how to best grow in your relationship with Him, and ask Him to help you choose a passage that will lead you in that direction.

Debrief Week Seven Using PERCH

Choose a passage from one of the psalms we read this week. It can be an entire psalm, or it can be a small portion of a psalm. If you chose a shorter passage, write out the passage below. If you choose a longer passage, choose key verses and keywords to write below.

1. Pray

Before moving forward, pray and ask God to speak to you through the study of His Word.

2. Examine and Reflect

Answer the questions below.

1. What does this passage teach about God?

2. What does this passage teach that we must obey?

3. How does this passage connect to the gospel?

Change: Prayerfully ask God how you can apply this passage to your life. Prayerfully consider what changes you need to make in your actions or beliefs in order to make the application of this passage to your life. Write these below.

Help: Prayerfully consider how you can help others using this passage. How can you share it with them? How can you spread the Truth of this passage to both believers and non-believers?

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