

# **Getting Started**

## **Overview of the Week**:

Our theme for the week is dwelling with God in times of trouble. This week and next week, our primary focus will be on application. We will be looking at these psalms more devotionally and discussing how to use them in our lives and in the lives of others.

## How Do I Prepare?

This week, we're going to look at several psalms that show psalmists walking with God during difficult times. We will study Psalm 56, 16, and 42 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:

"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11). 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, committing yourself to Him in times of good and times of bad. Use Psalm 16 to guide you as you write this prayer.

### Songs of the Week:

"Look Up, Child," Lauren Daigle; "Whom Shall I Fear?" Chris Tomlin; "You Never Let Go," Matt Redman; "As the Deer," Shane and Shane; "The Silence of God," Andrew Peterson

Link to playlist: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3BEh5j9yeffglo4EbmvRqW Scan the QR code to go directly to the playlist on Spotify.



# Week Nine Memory Verse:

Week Nine Prayer:

# Day One: Psalm 56, Part One

### 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

Have you ever had one of those days when it felt like all hope was lost, like there was no way out of a situation, or like you had nowhere you could turn? I'm pretty sure we all have. That's the situation David could have found himself in when he penned the words to Psalm 56. Rather than giving in to despair, however, he chose to trust in God. Read Psalm 56 below, and then read on to see what David's circumstances were and to see how we, too, can find peace and hope in the midst of dire straits.

<sup>1</sup> Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me; all day long an attacker oppresses me;
<sup>2</sup> my enemies trample on me all day long, for many attack me proudly.
<sup>3</sup> When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.
<sup>4</sup> In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?

<sup>5</sup> All day long they injure my cause;
all their thoughts are against me for evil.
<sup>6</sup> They stir up strife, they lurk;
they watch my steps,
as they have waited for my life.
<sup>7</sup> For their crime will they escape?
In wrath cast down the peoples, O God!

<sup>8</sup> You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle.
Are they not in your book?
<sup>9</sup> Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me.
<sup>10</sup> In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise,
<sup>11</sup> in God I trust; I shall not be afraid.
What can man do to me?

<sup>12</sup> I must perform my vows to you, O God;
I will render thank offerings to you.
<sup>13</sup> For you have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life. (ESV)

#### The Context:

David wrote this psalm when the Philistines had seized him at Gath (1 Sam 21:10-15). Here's the situation David was in at the time: in Chapter 17 of 1 Samuel, David defeats Goliath while King Saul looks on. In Chapter 18, directly following the battle, Saul brings David into his house, and David and Jonathan become great friends. Very shortly after their return from the defeat of Goliath, Saul grows jealous of David because the women sang a song glorifying David above Saul: "And the women sang to one another as they celebrated, 'Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands'" (1 Sam 18:7). 1 Sam 18:8-9 tells us that Saul became jealous and angry and began to closely watch David after this. Then, the next day, "an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul" (1 Sam 18:10), which caused Saul to try to kill David. From this point forward, David is having to fear for his life. By the time we come to chapter 21, David is fleeing from Saul, running for his life. He's also just left his home (since he had been living in the king's house) as well as his best friend, Jonathan. In the opening lines of chapter 21, we see that David is alone and without food or weapons to protect himself (vv. 1, 3, 8). Yet, God uses Ahimelech the priest to provide food and a sword for David.

At the time that David writes Psalm 56, he is in Gath with the Philistines, Israel's most fearsome enemy, whom he'd recently defeated by killing Goliath The king's servants recognize David and take him to the king. In an effort to save his own life, David now resorts to pretending to be insane — which, thankfully, works! So, it is under these circumstances that this psalm is penned.

David begins Psalm 56 with a plea to God for mercy. How remarkable! David, as far as we can see from Scripture, is not at fault in this scenario. Yet, what he asks for first and foremost is God's mercy. I think this shows David's lack of a sense of entitlement as well as his trust in God. David doesn't come to God complaining that he deserves better or that he is with God for allowing this to happen to him. He is not wallowing in self pity. Rather, he states his plight before God and pleads with Him to act on his behalf. His request for mercy shows that he is aware that God owes him nothing and would not be in the wrong were He to choose to withhold it. But he doesn't let that stop him from asking.

Furthermore, David displays his trust in God through this request for mercy. In a time when problem after problem had arisen, David's faith in God did not waiver. He was alone and had no help from others. It seemed he'd been abandoned. But he didn't let his circumstances shape what he knew to be true about God. He knew that God is faithful, trustworthy, and merciful, regardless of what circumstances dictate. David also did not let the actions of those around him shape his view of the character of God. Men had not been merciful to David. King Saul was trying to wrongfully take his life, and when he fled to Gath for Asylum, the Philistine servants took him to the king and reported him as being the one who had killed Goliath. Yet, David's faith in God and His unchanging character remained firm. When men showed no mercy to him, David still trusted God to act as God and not as man. Thus, David pleaded for mercy.

As you can see, David's circumstances were about as bad as they could get. His best friend's father was chasing after him with \*literal\* armies. He had fled to enemy territory and was pretending to be insane to save his life. Yet, he chose to fight for hope during this time. He easily could have given into his fears and begun complaining and moaning about his terrible straits (and we likely would not have blamed him). But he didn't! Instead, he turned to God and pleaded for mercy. He spoke out his requests to God and began to remind Himself of truths about God and His character. Not only does he turn to God for help, but he thanks God and praises Him! This spirit of thankfulness is what drives away the spirit of fear.

## Your Turn to Dig In

1. Read 1 Samuel 21:10-22:5. Reflect on David's situation he has found himself in and note the faith he retains in God despite his circumstances. Read 1 Samuel 22:3 closely. How does this verse demonstrate David's faith in God?

2. What is the significance of David beginning this psalm with a request for mercy from God? What does this show about David's understanding of who God is?

3. Reflecting on the psalm as a whole, write down what you notice about David purposefully choosing to place his trust in God. How does he do this? What does he remind himself of?

4. Re-read verse 8. What does this verse tell us about God's attentiveness and concern for His children?

5. Re-read verse 11. Answer David's rhetorical question of what man could do to him. What would be the worst-case scenario here? Why does that outcome not lead David to utter despair?

### **Reflection and Application**

Likely, most of us have not had to run for our lives like David did, but many of us have experienced terrible circumstances in which we felt like the world was against us and wherein there appeared to be little to no hope. But, just like David did not despair, we, too, should not give in to despair during desperate times. If you find yourself tempted to despair today, take the time to get a clearer view of God for who He is. Readjust your perspective so that you can see God's power, love, mercy, and faithfulness. Remember how God has helped you in the past and read here how God brought David out of dire circumstances. Praise God for who He is and for what He has done. And cry out for mercy from the God of the universe, trusting that He is true to His Word to never leave you or forsake You and that He truly has a beautiful plan for your life. Remember that these beautiful plans are often filled with difficulty but that the trials we face make us more like Christ, and the closer we are to Christ, the better we can help to advance His Kingdom and the more we will experience true peace, joy, and hope.

1. What situation in the past has brought you to the point of despair? Why? How did you overcome this?

2. Read the following excerpt from John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Then answer this question: What is Bunyan trying to teach us through this scene in his book? What connection does Bunyan point out between prayer and hope? What does the "key of promise" represent, and how can this "key" help believers when we find ourselves in what seems to be a hopeless situation?

So when the morning was come, the Giant went to them again, and took them into the castle yard, and showed them as his wife had bidden him. "These," said he, "were pilgrims as you are, once, and they trespassed' in my grounds, as you have done; and when I thought fit, I tore them in pieces; and so within ten days I will do to you: go, get you down to your den again!" And with that he beat them all the way thither. They lay, therefore, all day on Saturday in a lamentable case, as before. Now when night was come, and when Mrs. DIFFIDENCE, and her husband the Giant, were got to bed, they began to renew the discourse of their prisoners; and withal the old Giant wondered that he could neither by his blows nor counsel bring them to an end. And with that his wife replied: "I fear," said she, "that they live in hope that some will come to relieve them; or that they have picklocks about them; by the means of which they hope to escape." "And sayest thou so, my dear?" said the Giant; "I will therefore search them in the morning."

Well, on Saturday, about midnight the pilgrims began to pray; and continued in prayer till almost break of day.

Now a little before it was day, good CHRISTIAN, as one half amazed, break out in this passionate speech: "What a fool," quoth he, "am I, thus to lie in a stinking dungeon, when I may as well walk at liberty! I have a key in my bosom called Promise; that will, I am persuaded, open any lock in Doubting Castle." Then said HOPEFUL, "That's good news; good brother, pluck it out of thy bosom, and try."

Then CHRISTIAN pulled it out of his bosom, and began to try at the dungeon door; whose bolt (as he turned the key) gave back, and the door flew open with ease: and CHRISTIAN and HOPEFUL both came out. Then he went to the outward door that led into the castle yard; and with his key opened that door also. After, he went to the iron gate, for that must be opened too; but that lock went exceedingly hard: yet the key did open it. Then they thrust open the gate to make their escape with speed; but that gate, as it opened, made such a creaking, that it waked Giant DESPAIR: who, hastily rising to pursue his prisoners, felt his limbs to fail, for his fits took him again, so that he could by no means go after them. Then they went on, and came to the king's highway again; and so were safe, because they were out of his jurisdiction.

# Day Two: Psalm 56, Part Two

### 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 continue studying how to dwell with God in times of trouble, we'll return to Psalm 56. Read this psalm again in its entirety before moving on.

<sup>1</sup> Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me; all day long an attacker oppresses me;
<sup>2</sup> my enemies trample on me all day long, for many attack me proudly.
<sup>3</sup> When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.
<sup>4</sup> In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?

<sup>5</sup> All day long they injure my cause;
all their thoughts are against me for evil.
<sup>6</sup> They stir up strife, they lurk;
they watch my steps,
as they have waited for my life.
<sup>7</sup> For their crime will they escape?
In wrath cast down the peoples, O God!

<sup>8</sup> You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle.
Are they not in your book?
<sup>9</sup> Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me.
<sup>10</sup> In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise,
<sup>11</sup> in God I trust; I shall not be afraid.
What can man do to me?

<sup>12</sup> I must perform my vows to you, O God;
I will render thank offerings to you.
<sup>13</sup> For you have delivered my soul from death,
yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before
God in the light of life. (ESV)

#### The Context:

As we saw in Psalm 56 and 1 Samuel 17-21, David was literally fleeing for his life from King Saul and his enemies. He had left home, was completely alone, and was now in the land of the Philistines, just after he had killed Goliath. He even pretended to be insane to save his own life.

Thankfully, I've never actually been in a situation like David's before. I've never had anyone — especially not my best friend's father — try to murder me. I've never had to flee for my life completely alone. Yet, there are times when I feel this same sense of despair. Most often, it's not because others are out to get me but that my own thoughts are. I don't know what to call it — anxiety, worry, mind flu — something. But I know that my mind can very easily convince me that the world is out to get me. In reality, though, it's often my own flesh that is. This experience mirrors verse two of Psalm 56: "my slanderers pursue me all day long; many are attacking me in their pride" (NIV).

I can convince myself that the people around me are against me. Yet, 99% of the time, they haven't given me a second thought. Most often, my own thoughts are the ones slandering me. And Satan knows exactly which thoughts to assail me with. Then, I take those thoughts, and, instead of taking them captive and making them "obedient to Christ" (2 Cor 10:5, ESV), I feed them so that they grow and flourish within me, poisoning my mind against myself and others. This is sin because I am allowing sinful thoughts to reign supreme within me rather than submitting my thoughts and emotions to Christ. And, from my experience, it seems I am not alone but that many of us struggle in this same area.

So, what should we do when lies fill our minds and overwhelming emotions fill our hearts with anxiety? Psalm 56:3-4 answers this for us: "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose Word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh man do to me?" (ESV). In times of trouble, I know what the Bible teaches. I know it teaches me not to fear but to instead place my faith in God. What I often struggle with is exactly *how* to do this.

**First, we need to acknowledge who God is and praise Him for it**. Doing so takes our eyes off of ourselves and puts them on Him. Turn to His Word and look for passages that give proof about God's power, might, and sovereignty, that show Him as Good. Don't just google verses that are directly relevant to the problems at hand, as this keeps our sights on ourselves and our problems rather than on God. When we instead turn our eyes to Christ, we can see something so much bigger and beautiful than ourselves and can put our current problems into the proper perspective. Doing so allows us to believe the promises from God that He works all things for our good, that He uses trials to make us more like Him, and that His thoughts and ways are higher and better than what we could devise.

Second, we need to praise and thank God for what He has done in our lives and others' lives. Twice in Ps 56, David writes about placing His trust in God. He's choosing to set His mind on the Truth about God being trustworthy (Ps 56: 3-4, 10-13). In verse 12, he says he offers "thank offerings" to God, and in verse 13, he recalls God's past goodness to him. If we can't muster up these thoughts on our own (or even when we can), we need to turn to God's Word and let Him speak for Himself. Some great places to start are Ps 77, Ps 103, and Ps 145. After praising Him for who He is, we should recall what He's done for us. When we can't think of anything or don't know where to start, we can begin by thanking God for our salvation and then turn to Scriptures like "The Song of Moses and Miriam" in Exodus 15 and praise God for the mighty acts He performed for others. Many times, praising God for what He's done in the lives of others is one of the hardest things to do as it can be tempting to give in to jealousy and self pity during times of difficulty. However, when we are able to begin to praise God and thank Him for what He has done for others and not just for what He has done for us, we grow in our love that we have for Him as well as those around us.

Third, we must remember that our minds are twisting our thoughts during these times. Recall Psalm 56:5. Take note of the NIV version here, as it makes it extra clear: "All day long they twist my words; they are always plotting to kill me" (NIV). Although this Psalm, again, is David talking about his human enemies, the concept applies to our thoughts and spiritual foes as well. Our minds twist our internal words and those of others into slightly different versions of the truth, but these twists are lies, and the intent of them is to destroy. After all, Satan is the father of lies (Jn 8:44), and his intention is to destroy.

Fourth, we need to refuse to be controlled by our former selves and must submit to God instead. 1 Pe 5:8 tells us, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (NIV). With full knowledge that Satan seeks to devour, we must pray earnestly for the Holy Spirit to give us self control so that we can withstand the battles in our minds. Do as Paul urges in 2 Cor 10:5 and take every thought captive: "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (NIV). Recognize the lies for what they are, and choose, instead, to purposefully believe and trust the Truth rather than the lies that Satan is placing into our minds and that our flesh want to believe.

#### Your Turn to Dig In

1. Take some time to reflect on David's situation that he found himself in while running away for his life. Write down which parts of his situation you think would have been especially difficult for him. What would have been hardest for you during a time like this?

2. We began this study with several weeks of looking at the attributes of God as seen in various psalms. The first step to overcoming despair, anxiety, or troubling thoughts in a difficult season is to look to God and see Him for who He truly is. What attributes of God are evident in this passage?

3. Read verse 13. For what purpose does God deliver David? What is David now expected to do?

### **Reflection and Application**

Dying to self is never easy, and it is something we must face each day. There truly is a daily battle going on in our minds, but it is not a battle by which we must be defeated. Rather, we must remember that God has given us everything we need to fight the battle of faith. Putting on the Armor of God and arming ourselves with Scripture, we have all the power that we need to live a victorious life, complete with a peace-filled mind that allows us to live lives of joy and hopefulness.

1. What "battletime" Scriptures do you have ready at hand when troubling times come up? Write them down below. If you don't have an arsenal of Scriptures ready to battle the enemy, take some time now to search for some you can have ready to defeat the lies of satan.

2. Read the "Song of Moses and Miriam" in Exodus 15. Practice praising God and thanking Him for delivering the Israelites out of Egypt. Praise Him for His awesomeness, His power, and His might! Focus on being thankful for God's deliverance of others from their distresses, working on cultivating an "attitude of gratitude" that is not dependent upon your circumstances.

3. The last application item for today is to spend time memorizing a passage of Scripture. If you haven't already memorized this week's memory verse, go ahead and do that. In addition to memorizing it, make a notecard with that verse on it. Put it in a prominent place so that you can refer to it regularly. An extra challenge is to make a second card with one of the "battletime" Scriptures you wrote down in the question above. Spend time committing that verse to memory, as well, and be sure to display this verse in a prominent location.

# Day Three: Lessons from Psalm 16

# 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 continue learning to dwell with God in times of trouble, we'll turn to Psalm 16. Read this psalm in its entirety before moving on.

<sup>1</sup> Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge. <sup>2</sup> I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord;

I have no good apart from you."

<sup>3</sup> As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.

<sup>4</sup> The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips.

<sup>5</sup> The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.

<sup>6</sup> The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; (ESV) indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.

<sup>7</sup> I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;
in the night also my heart instructs me.
<sup>8</sup> I have set the LORD always before me;
because he is at my right hand,
I shall not be shaken.

<sup>9</sup> Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices;
my flesh also dwells secure.
<sup>10</sup> For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.

You make known to me the path of life;
 in your presence there is fullness of joy;
 at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.
 (ESV)

#### The Context:

This psalm is labeled "a miktam of David." Matthew Henry points out that "miktam" is translated by some as "golden psalm," going on to say that this is considered one of the most precious of all psalms. And I can certainly see why. I, too, consider this to be one of David's most beautiful and precious psalms because of the way it focuses on God and His goodness. But most of all, it points to Christ, who is the great promise of the Old Testament and fulfillment of the New.

We can tell from the full reading of the psalm that David is in a place of trouble. He asks God for preservation, reminds himself of God being his refuge, speaks of receiving counsel in the night, and talks about not being shaken.

And though David is clearly in a time of trial/trouble, he doesn't write with a tone of despondence or despair but rather one of joy and contentment. He's not anxious in his tone but is calm and collected, knowing that God is in control. In this psalm, David is doing what many people do when fearful - talking himself down. The difference here, though, is that David is not just grasping at straws to make himself feel better. He's not "pulling himself up by his bootstraps." He's not saying, "I got this." No, he's doing something much, much more (and much, much wiser) than that. He's preaching to himself using the ultimate Truth, reminding himself that the God of the universe is the one in whom he is taking refuge and placing his hope.

Rather than turning to positive self talk, David recognizes that God is his hope and begins to remind himself why. He commits himself to the Lord in verse 2 and acknowledges that all good is only from God alone. He commits himself again to God in verse 5 and agrees to accept whatever lot God gives him. Again, he does not do this out of despair or as a consolation. No, he has already stated in verse 2 that God is the giver of good. So, he is trusting God to bring good out of this situation and commits to accepting and receiving whatever it is that God brings his way.

In verse 6, David again reminds himself that God has already given him the ultimate good: "a beautiful inheritance." David knows that in the end, he will spend eternity with God and knows that heaven is a place filled with the presence of God. He looks to the hope of heaven for his future hope.

He then acknowledges God's help that he has given and continues to give here on earth. God gives him counsel, even in the night, even in times when things are the darkest. He brings to mind the fact that God is always with him and that because of that, he will "not be shaken" (verse 8).

David then writes words of comfort and peace: "Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure" (verse 9). He is able to be glad in the midst of trials because he's not trying to stand on his own two feet. He's leaning on the promises given to Him by God and holding fast to his faith. He's not trying to twist his circumstances and try this and try that in order to make a way for himself. Rather, he's accepting the way that God has already made, remembering that God has caused the lines to fall "in pleasant places" for him (verse 6).

He closes out with the reminder of the goodness of God and the security he offers. He knows that no matter what happens, God will not abandon him, and eternally, his soul is secure. He finishes with these words: "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." What could be better than knowing the path of life? God's path is always the one full of life, for He is the Creator of life itself. His presence offers fullness of joy because He is the bringer of joy. It springs forth from His Spirit. We needn't look to ourselves to solve our problems or to steady our hearts. If we do, we won't find the answers but will instead find frustration, anxiety, and fear. Rather, we must look to God, cling to His promises, and accept whatever He brings our way, knowing that it will ultimately bring life and goodness.

### Your Turn to Dig In

1. Read verses 1 and 5. What connection do you see between these verses?

2. Read verse 6. Here, David reminds Himself of God's goodness to Him, focusing on how God has truly been faithful and good to Him. Oftentimes, we can be tempted to only focus on the bad, escalating situations beyond what they are. Why is verse 6 a crucial verse in this psalm?

3. Read verse 7. In the first half of the verse, he blesses God for giving Him counsel but says that he receives instruction from his heart in the second half of the verse. Why do you think David's heart is able to give him sound counsel in the night? What has happened here that allows for David's heart in this scenario not to be deceitful?

4. Read verse 8. Why should the presence of Almighty God keep us from fear?

5. Repeatedly, David references his eternal future. Read back through the psalm, and write down instances of David's keeping an eternal mindset. Then, explain the connection between an eternal mindset and a peaceful spirit.

## **Reflection and Application**

David's focus on the eternal allows Him to have peace regardless of the situation he is facing. Sure, this is not the case at all times for David. We have read many psalms in which David cries out in fear to the Lord. In this one, though, he has found peace by reminding Himself of the goodness of God and by retaining an eternal perspective. I hope and pray that you, too, can find peace knowing that God is good and that He is reigning not only over the world at large but over the details of your life, as well. I hope this truth encourages you to follow Him even more closely, choosing His ways over the ways of the world, even when that breeds difficult circumstances.

 Re-read verse 4. In this verse, David adamantly takes a stand against turning to false gods in order to find a way out of his difficult situation. He is chooses instead to place his faith and trust in God alone, refusing to do as many in his culture do and seek help in an ungodly manner. When you find yourself in a difficult situation, what aspects of our culture are you most tempted to turn to rather than turning to God? (For example, do you turn to gossip as a way to "vent" about a situation? Do you turn to substances to help you overcome the stresses of the day? Married ladies, have you turned to someone other than your spouse to get the emotional or physical connection you crave? Single ladies, have you sought to avoid loneliness through a relationship with a nonbeliever or chosen physical intimacy outside of marriage?)

2. Take another look at your answer to the previous question. Now, explain why God is better than whatever alternative you wrote down above. Please do not move on until you believe the answer you write to this question. This may take soul searching, Scripture searching, a call to a friend, and will certainly take time in prayer. Ask God to help you see Him as more precious and glorious than anything this world has to offer.

# Day Four: Psalm 42

# 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. Ask that the Lord would give you a grateful heart before Him today.

# 2. Examine

Today, we will study Psalm 42. Read this psalm in its entirety before moving on.

<sup>1</sup>As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.
<sup>2</sup> My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
<sup>3</sup> My teans have been and appear before God?
<sup>3</sup> My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long,
"Where is your God?"
<sup>4</sup> These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival.

<sup>5</sup> Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation <sup>6</sup> and my God. My soul is cast down within me;

therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. <sup>7</sup> Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me.

<sup>8</sup> By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.
<sup>9</sup> I say to God, my rock: "Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"
<sup>10</sup> As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?"

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God. (ESV)

#### The Context:

Psalm 42 is the first of the psalms in book 2 of the Psalms. It is written by the Sons of Korah, Levites who served in the temple. Korah, their ancestor, was killed by God for leading a rebellion while Moses and the Israelites were in the wilderness. However, his sons survived. Not only were they not killed, but they were allowed to continue to serve God in His holy Tabernacle.

This is a psalm of deep, longing need for God. We see this from the very first verse: "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so my soul pants for you, O God" (ESV). Charles Spurgeon comments on this verse: "Ease he did not seek, honour he did not covet, but the enjoyment of communion with God was an urgent need of his soul; he viewed it not merely as the sweetest of all luxuries, but as an absolute necessity, like water to a stag." The psalmists here have the perfect perspective. They know that their greatest need is not physical but spiritual nourishment. They are in need of our great God.

The emotional distress of the psalmists is immediately made clear in the verses that follow. The psalmist is in emotional anguish, calling out to God. He longs to commune with God but is unable to do so as he had done before. Here, it is significant that this psalm was written by the sons of Korah. These individuals were used to communing with God in a special way in the God's House of Worship. In this instance, they are unable to do so, and this brings anguish to their souls. This anguish is exacerbated by people taunting them, asking why God is absent. These taunts ring in the psalmists' ears as they recall earlier times when they could worship in the House of the Lord with gladness. These bittersweet memories also fill the psalmists with grief.

Rather than allowing themselves to remain engulfed by grief and sadness, the psalmists begin to lift up their spirits. They stop and recognize what is happening, asking themselves why they are downcast. In response, rather than allowing themselves to spiral downwards, the psalmists instead preach to themselves; they say, "Hope in God!" John Piper writes about his own experiences with overcoming discouragement in this same way: "I cannot tell you how many hundreds of times in the last twenty-eight years at Bethlehem I have fought back the heaviness of discouragement with these very words: "Hope in God, John. Hope in God. You will again praise him. This miserable emotion will pass. This season will pass. Don't be downcast. Look to Jesus. The light will dawn." The key to overcoming discouragement, doubt, or despair is always returning to the hope that is found in God. As Hebrews 6:19 reminds us, "We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain" (ESV).

The psalmists continue to struggle for a way out of depression: they remember God but at the same time feel drowned in a sea of hopelessness. Rather than allowing themselves to drown in their sorrows and grief, though, they instead try to remember the Lord. This reminds me of a time I was climbing a waterfall and got stuck between some rocks while near the top. The area was steep, and the water kept cascading down onto my face. Although it wasn't a huge amount of water, for a moment, I felt as though I was drowning. I couldn't get my foot placement below me because of the slipperiness of the rocks, and all I could see and feel were the waters continually rushing upon me. After a few moments, I was able to move well enough to call to a friend ahead of me for help. He then pulled me up out of the rocks, and I was able to see clearly and continue the climb. That's what the psalmists are doing here: they're stuck in despair and hopelessness and are calling out to God to pull them up out of it. They're using the promises of God and the truths they know about God to climb onto and help bring them up out of the roaring waters.

Verse 8 is a burst of hope! The psalmists remember the steadfast love of God, noting that God commands it over them. They remind themselves that God is not absent. Rather, He is with them, even in the night, both literally and metaphorically. The psalmists restore their confidence in the Lord due to the fact that true remembrances of God's character and past actions show that God is good, active, and present. But verse 9 shows that a simple recalling of God's goodness isn't enough to immediately squash all of the feelings the psalmists have been experiencing. No; the battle continues. But this fact is crucial: the psalmists continue to fight. They do not give up and continue to express their feelings of desperation to God, while at the same time reminding themselves of the confidence they have in God, who is their Rock, the one on whom they can stand.

In the final section of the psalm, we see that though the psalmists are still struggling, they have not given up hope. Rather, the psalmists end by again preaching to themselves, telling their spirits to hope in God. They end confidently, knowing that God will not leave them in despair. They know that they will one day once again be able to praise God joyfully in His House and, therefore, end the psalm with hope rather than desperation.

### Your Turn to Dig In

1. Reflect on the word "pants" in verse 1. You may not have seen a deer pant for water, but most likely you've seen a dog or cat pant for water. They do so because they are thirsty, in need of water. Why do you think the psalmist uses this comparison in Psalm 42?

2. I absolutely love verses 5 and 6 because they are raw and honest before God. The psalmists are broken and downcast. They are struggling to come up out of this depressed state. I think we have all been there! What these verses show us is that it is okay to be raw and honest before God, to show Him that our hearts are struggling. Is there something your heart is struggling with right now? If so, write it down and confess it before the Lord. 3. The psalmists repeatedly refer to God as their hope and salvation. How are these two ideas connected, and why are they significant aspects of the hope we have?

4. Read verse 8. What do the psalmists say is with them in the night? When you are unable to sleep and fear or worry has gripped your soul, what song is with you? I encourage you to choose a psalm and a hymn or praise song to consistently bring to mind during times like these. Write down some ideas you have for psalms and songs you could have "at the ready" during times like this. Some of mine are Proverbs 3:5-6, Psalm 27, and Psalm 3. Songs I sing to myself during times of depression, anxiety, or fear are "Lord, I Need You" and "Thou, O Lord."

### **Reflection and Application**

In his book titled *Spiritual Depression*, Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones comments on the psalmist's response to his troubles in Psalm 42:

"Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them but they are talking to you, they bring back the problems of yesterday, etc. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you. Now this man's treatment [in Psalm 42] was this: instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" he asks. His soul had been depressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says, "Self, listen for moment, I will speak to you."

Dr. Jones's words are crucial for those of us who find ourselves in moments of anxiety, stress, or fear. Rather than allowing our old self (our flesh) to talk to us, we must allow the new man (the one with the Holy Spirit) to do the talking. It is dire that we preach the Word of God to ourselves on a daily basis and not allow our flesh to reign supreme over us. Our hearts and minds will lie to us if we let them; that is why we must not receive truth from within but must find it within Scripture instead and must fill ourselves up with it on a daily basis. As Buster always says: we are leaky buckets!

1. What do you need to preach to yourself today? Is there a lie you are believing that you need to refute? Is there a feeling that is welling up within you that you need to get rid of? Whatever it is, write it out below. Then, ask God to help you hope in Him rather than give way to the lies of the world or the flesh.

2. a. Has there been a season in your life when you've felt like God was absent or silent? What was that like, and how did God bring you out of that season? Write that down below. Now, commit to helping someone who is going through a similar season. Be intentional about genuinely asking others how they are doing and digging into the lives of those around you. It'll get messy, but it's worth it! We were made to live in authentic community and fellowship with one another.

b. Or perhaps you're in that season right now. If so, what feelings are you experiencing? What has your struggle been like? If you're in this season now, I encourage you to preach the Truth to yourself today and not to struggle alone. Talk to someone in your small group; let them pray with you and encourage you.

3. Write out Psalm 42:11. Do this more than one time. Spend time meditating upon this verse, and write a prayer of commitment to the Lord that you will not remain in despair or fear. Rather, commit to struggling through it with His help.

# Day Five: Week Nine Debrief & PERCH Study

The psalms in this week's study have been some of the dearest to my heart in recent years, especially Psalm 42. Beginning in August of 2018, I began going through some of the toughest times of my life that I've yet experienced. From August of 2018 until about May of 2020, I struggled daily with fear, anxiety, and depression. In August of 2018, the mission team I had joined absolutely fell apart, and the ministry I'd devoted years to was on the brink of destruction. I watched as the people who I had teamed up with to reach people who didn't know Jesus lashed out at one another in front of the ones we had been called overseas to love. I watched as people left our baby church plant, as relationships were broken, and as people who had very little experience with Christians saw anger and hatred spewing forth from those who claimed to have the Truth. Months later, I received a phone call that my mother had gone into a coma while I was at a minimum 36 hours away. After the Lord graciously healed her, I got another phone call at 1 in the morning saying that my sister's husband had passed away unexpectedly in his sleep at the age of 28, leaving my 27 year old sister a widow and their 17 month old son without a father. All of this was more than I could bear. I knew I needed to be home with my family and, thus, left the mission field and returned to America feeling defeated and confused.

As I tried to adjust to life in the US, I did so while having to deal with the fact that our ministry in Asia had crumbled, that there were people who never got to hear the rest of the gospel, and then had to hear about our entire English and Outreach Center being closed up, never to open again. I also was dealing with not only my own grief from the loss of my beloved brother-in-law, but worse than that: I had to watch as my sister grieved the loss of her husband and father of her child. I listened as my sweet nephew told me that his Dada lived with Jesus and as he would ask my sister repeatedly to get him a Dada. Every phone call I got, I expected another death or serious illness. And some of them were just that. Two months after returning from the field, my grandmother had a stroke, my grandfather was diagnosed with terminal cancer, and our cousin was run over and killed by a bulldozer while at work. As a result of all this, I was so overcome with fear, anxiety, and depression that I was absolutely paralyzed. I wanted to get involved with the church and jump back in to community that I had so dearly missed. But I felt like I was drowning in a sea of emotions and didn't know how to come up for air. It felt just like I did when I was physically caught under the cascading water of the waterfall.

Yet through it all, God was with me. Many days -- many, many days -- I did not feel Him, and I felt like He was absent or silent. Many days, I did not turn to His Word or to spiritual songs or hymns. Many days, I let my flesh overcome me and dwelt only in my emotions, not allowing God's Truth to enter into my thoughts and not preaching the Truth to myself.

But God. God refused to let me linger in this fear, anxiety, and depression. And He brought me through it using the Psalms. I began turning to the Psalms regularly when all of this first began occurring in 2018, and I dug deeper and deeper into them over the next 2 years. It was a struggle, but I am so thankful God did not give up on me and leave me in my despair. I am so thankful that I had the psalms to turn to and that eventually, the cloud lifted! It took what seemed like forever for me not to feel like I was still climbing up out of the muck and mire while having a waterfall of emotions tumbling down upon me. But as I continued to turn to the Lord, by God's grace, He pulled me up and set my feet on the rock of His Truth.

I would never in a million years have asked for the situations I went through over the past 2 years. And I cannot say with honesty that I would go back and do it all the same again. I, in fact, would not. If I had it my way, we would rewind and undo the mess that happened in Asia. We would undo my mother's illness and certainly would never have lost my precious brother in law. You see, I would never want to allow suffering in my life or in the lives of those around me. But God, in His mercy and grace, has used that suffering to grow me and to show me pieces of Himself I would never have seen. He has allowed me to watch Him heal not only me but also my family. In the midst of me typing this lesson today, He allowed me to talk with my sister about how she was able to go to church today and take her little boy there to learn about the Lord Jesus, with whom his daddy now lives in heaven. He's taught me that the God who is in the light is still the God in the dark, for darkness is but light to Him! And He has taught me that I can trust Him regardless of whether the entire world crumbles around me or not. He is the constant, and He remains the same now and forever.

The fruit of this time has been this study through the Psalms. Whether or not anyone else has benefitted from going through these passages of Scriptures and these reflections, I surely have. The psalms have been a balm for my soul and have allowed my soul to heal. They have helped me be there for those around me who are hurting and have blessed me by allowing me to return to ministry, something I feared would never happen after I left Asia.

So now as you reflect on this week's theme of dwelling with God in times of trouble, I want to encourage you. There is light at the end of the tunnel, and that light is Jesus! He is the light of the world, and He offers hope that none other can give, for His hope is eternal! If you do not know the hope that he offers, I want to extend an invitation to know Him now. Life with Christ is not easy; it is downright difficult at times. But it is always, always worth it, and He is more beautiful and compassionate than I could ever imagine. If you are without hope and in need of hope, don't hesitate to reach out to someone in your group today. Email or call Rose if you need someone to talk to, or contact me. My email address is pkellycooper@gmail.com, and my phone number is (843) 737-2061. It would be my privilege to talk with you about how to have a lasting relationship with Jesus Christ.

As you choose a passage to study today, I encourage you to choose a portion of Scripture that fills you with the hope and joy that come with being a follower of Christ.

### **Debrief Week Nine 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?

294