



THE PSALMS

**GOD'S COMFORT FOR
UNCOMFORTABLE TIMES**

WRITTEN BY

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INTRODUCTION

I have a confession to make: I am not a music person.

I know that for some people, this is an unfathomable statement. What kind of person doesn't like music? Everyone likes music. It's not that I hate music; I'm not a monster. It's just not something that I think about often or spend much time listening to. When I get into the car, I turn on audiobooks or podcasts; when I'm at home doing the dishes, I have the TV on in the background. Sure, there are some songs and artists I like more than others, but if you were to name a few popular artists, there's a good chance that I wouldn't be able to list many (or any!) of their songs.

"Okay, okay, we get it," you might be thinking. "Music isn't your thing. That's a little strange, but whatever floats your boat. Why are you bringing this up though?" Here's why: as much as I am not much of a music person in general, my tune changes when it comes to worship music.

In case you couldn't already tell, I am a left-brained kind of person, a chronic overthinker. And so because of this, when it comes to my faith, it's easy for me to talk about the Bible and theology all day long, but much harder for me to emotionally experience my faith. Yet I have found that in worship,⁽ⁱ⁾ I am more fully able to feel God's presence. And at times when I have felt despair, listening to worship music has been a source of comfort, reminding me of the truths that I struggle to believe.



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The point I am trying to make here is that music does something to us. It acts upon us differently than normal, everyday speech. It engages not only our minds, but our emotions and feelings too. Contrary to what some of us might think, God did not create us as brains, but as whole people, emotions included. And this is why he gave us the Psalms.

The Book of Psalms is the songbook of Israel. This is the hymnal God gave to Israel for corporate worship, but unlike our hymn books, the Psalms are inspired by God. Though penned by human beings, these songs are at the same time God's word, and they contain "the kinds of sentiments God wants to hear from his people in their worship."(ii)

And when we sing these things, when we confess in song God's truth, it does something to us. Singing presses God's truth deeper into our hearts, by acting on our emotions and affections. And it begins to shape how we think and feel.(iii)

You see, our feelings are not morally neutral. So often, we treat them as if they were, saying things such as, "well that's just how I feel." Our feelings are important (after all, God created them!), but how we feel does not always line up with the reality of how things are or how we are supposed to feel. The fact that I feel like everybody is mad at me doesn't necessarily mean that it is true. And the hatred I feel towards my neighbor is not something I am meant to simply accept and nurture. The fact that we are emotional beings is a good thing, but this does not mean that our emotions are always good or accurate. And so we need to shape them.

This is what singing the Psalms does to us. It trains our emotions and feelings towards God and his truth. It trains us to love what God loves, to hate what he hates, to see the world how he sees it, and to trust in his goodness and presence when times are hard, even if he seems far off.

The last 16 months have been hard. We have all experienced fear, stress, loneliness, discomfort, and above all, fatigue. In the last year, we have lived through a global pandemic, worldwide protests ignited by the death of George Floyd, a highly contentious presidential election, the death of a Supreme Court Justice, and a riot in our nation's capital.

And even though we seem to be nearing the end of the pandemic, many of us right now feel disoriented—disoriented and afraid that life will never again return to the way it was. And perhaps it won't. But for the believer, the solution to a world turned out of sorts is not to wallow in the discomfort but to turn our attention back to what we know to be true. The solution is to sing the Psalms (or in our case, read them) and press the truth of God's word more firmly into our hearts, to reorient ourselves towards ultimate reality, to help us "not fear, though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea" (Psalm 46:2).

Over the course of this study, we will look at six psalms of comfort. Now in saying this, I'm not claiming that these psalms all belong to the same genre or type of psalm, or that these are even the most comforting psalms in the Bible. In a way, every psalm provides comfort to the people of God, by enabling us to celebrate his goodness, trust his plans, cry out and lament, knowing he cares about our struggles, and to hope for the world he is renewing. These psalms merely offer a range and taste of the book as a whole, and in studying them together, we will shape our emotions and feelings towards true reality, finding comfort and hope not only for today but for whatever the future may hold.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

At the end of the day, we want you to use this study in the way that is most beneficial to you. Here are some suggestions for how to use it, but feel free to make adjustments to fit your own needs and situation.

This study is designed to be used over a 6-week period. Each week, we will study a different psalm, through both this study guide and a video lesson. You can start with either. The video lessons will cover the big idea of each psalm, while the study guide will give you the opportunity to dig deeper and meditate on the psalm using study and reflection questions. You can do the questions all in one sitting or split them up throughout the week. It's okay if you don't know how to answer every question!

If you want to go deeper, consider discussing the video and a few of the study questions with a friend or small group. You will notice some of the questions in this guide are bolded—these are the ones we recommend you focus on in group discussion.

Finally, at the end of this guide, there will be some resources for you to further explore the Psalms and incorporate them into your daily life.

PSALM 103

Introduction

Psalm 103 has always held a special place in my heart. It was my grandmother's favorite psalm, and having lost her before I really got to know her, reading it made me feel closer to her. Plus, I felt like it was talking about me: "But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children..." (v. 17).

As much as I loved this psalm as a child, it has become even more precious to me throughout the years, as I've learned how it connects to the Bible's big story and reminds us of the heart and character of our God. Psalm 103 is a beautiful "hymn of praise, celebrating the abundant goodness and love of the Lord for his people."(iv) It calls us to worship the Lord, reminding us of what he has done for us.

Now you might be wondering why we would focus on a hymn of praise in a study on God's comfort. Two important reasons come to mind. Firstly, there is nothing more comforting in the whole world than the promise of God's steadfast love and mercy. This is where our ultimate security and hope in life lies—not in our circumstances, but in the knowledge that "as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us" (v. 12).

But there is a second reason why we need to explore a psalm like this during less than ideal times. As human beings, we have incredibly short memories. Although God has displayed his steadfast love and faithfulness to us on countless occasions, we are prone to forget. We behave just like the people of Israel did, doubting God's goodness and provision when times get tough, in spite of the many ways he has proven himself to be kind and faithful. And so we need to help our poor memories. We need to continually remind ourselves of what our God has done for us, just as David does in this psalm, and let that reminder fuel our praise. When times are difficult, we don't always feel inclined to praise. But we must do it anyway. Remember—God gave us the Psalms to shape us, to train us to think and feel the way he desires. So when we sing or read a psalm like this in difficult times, we are actually changing the way we feel, and moving our hearts away from depression and self-pity towards thankfulness and joy.(v)

Read the Text

Read Psalm 103. Then, read it again more slowly. Consider looking at more than one translation. Underline anything that sticks out to you, paying special attention to any repeated words or phrases. Try to break the psalm into sections, giving each section a summarizing heading. Note any questions or observations in the margins. Pray that God uses this psalm to shape your heart towards his truth.

STUDY AND REFLECT ON THE TEXT

Bless the Lord, O My Soul, and Do Not Forget His Benefits (vv. 1-2)(vi)

1. What do you think it means to “bless the Lord?” What does the psalmist mean when he speaks of the Lord’s benefits? How might remembering the Lord’s benefits (v. 2) be a part of blessing him?

The Benefits (vv. 3-19)

2. What benefits does the psalmist list (vv. 3-19)? Who are these benefits for? (Hint: pay attention to the personal pronouns used throughout these verses)

The psalmist begins by speaking of our personal experience of God’s benefits in vv. 3-5. Then, in vv. 6-14, he shifts from “you” to “us,” recounting God’s goodness to his covenant people Israel.

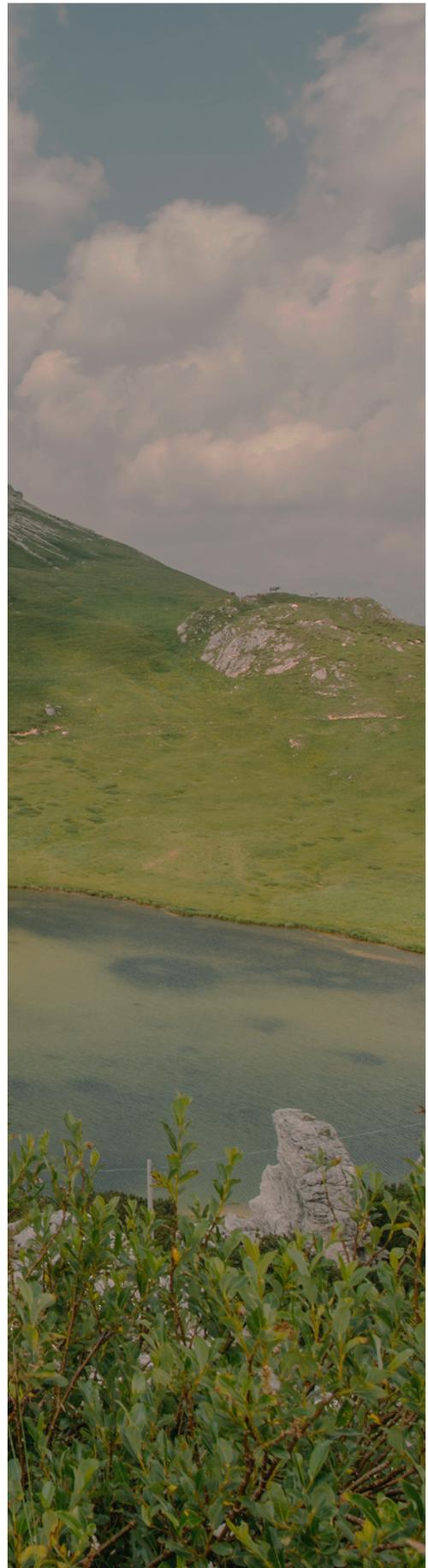
3. Take a moment to reflect on the benefits that the psalmist lists. Think about your own story. How have you experienced God’s goodness and mercy in your life? Where has he shown up in your story?

4. The majority of us reading this passage are not ethnically Jewish. How then does a passage like this, which speaks of God’s goodness and grace towards Israel, apply to us? (Hint: read Gal. 3:29, Eph. 3:6, and Rom. 11:11-24)

5. Read Exodus 32-34. Skimming is okay, but make sure to slow down for Exodus 34:6-7.

a. Where does Exodus 32-34 fall in Israel’s story? What has God just done for them, and what have they just promised to do? (Hint: read Ex. 19:3-8, 20:3-6)

b. What similarities do you see between Exodus 34:6-7 and Psalm 103:6-14? What does God say about who he is?



In Psalm 103, the psalmist makes a reference to a crucial moment in Israel's history where God's steadfast love and mercy were fully on display. Though God had just delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt and made a special commitment to them, before the ink is even dried on the marriage certificate, Israel commits adultery, deciding to worship a golden calf instead of the one true God. Yet instead of casting them aside, God extends grace and mercy, revealing his essential character (Ex. 34:6-7, Ps. 103:8-13) and ways (Ex. 33:13, Ps. 103:7).(vii) This is who God is. This is how he acts towards his people. And this is what the psalmist is celebrating in Psalm 103—the God who forgave Israel's rebellion at Sinai, and continually forgives their sins, because of his steadfast commitment to his people.

6. Based on Exodus 34:6-7 and Psalm 103, how would you respond to those who characterize the God of the Old Testament as harsh and unloving, especially when compared with the God of the New Testament?

7. In vv. 11, 13, and 17, the psalmist promises that the Lord's steadfast love and mercy will extend to "those who fear him." What does it mean to fear the Lord? Who is the psalmist promising these blessings to? (Hint: look at v. 18)

8. Do you view God the way that the psalmist describes? Do you see him as a merciful and compassionate father? Why or why not?

9. If you are a parent or grandparent, how does v. 17 affect you? Does it bring you comfort, or is it a source of pain? How (if at all) will it change how you act towards your children and grandchildren? If you are not a parent or grandparent, how might you be called to do your part to train up the next generation?

Let All Creation Join in Blessing the Lord (vv. 20-22)

10. Why do you think the psalmist ends by calling on all creation to bless the Lord?

11. Psalm 103 was written long before the coming of Jesus. How does knowing the end of the story enhance the beauty of Psalm 103?

12. How has studying Psalm 103 affected your heart and soul? How has it changed your view of God? Your view of yourself? What will you do differently this week in light of this psalm?

PSALM 46

Introduction

Psalm 46 is probably a familiar one to most of us—and rightly so! The declarations and promises it contains about our God are of immense comfort in times of distress. I can clearly recall specific moments in my life when I have turned to Psalm 46 for consolation. Maybe you can too.

But as comforting as I have always found Psalm 46 to be, it took me a while to fully understand just how comforting this psalm truly is. Psalm 46 is one of those passages where, if we aren't paying attention, we just might miss the magnitude of what is being promised. As we shall see as we start to dig into this text, Psalm 46 is not primarily about us as individuals and the trials we face (although it certainly offers hope to us individually!). No, it's so much bigger than that. In Psalm 46, we are reminded of God's promise to preserve his people and to bless the nations through them. He has made an everlasting commitment to us and is with us, now and forever. And because of this, we can have hope in all circumstances, for nothing shall thwart God's promise to preserve his people.

Read the Text

Read Psalm 46. Then, read it again more slowly. Consider looking at more than one translation. Underline anything that sticks out to you, paying special attention to any repeated words or phrases. Try to break the psalm into sections, giving each section a summarizing heading. Note any questions or observations in the margins. Pray that God uses this psalm to shape your heart towards his truth.

STUDY AND REFLECT ON THE TEXT

A Mighty Fortress is Our God (vv. 1-7)

1. The psalmist calls God our “refuge and strength” (v. 1). What do you think he means by this? How is God our refuge? How is he our strength?

2. The psalmist says that God is “a very present help in trouble” (v. 1). What the psalmist means by this is that God is ready to come to the aid of those who call on him. And not only that, but having God with us is all that we need to face any problem.

a. When you face difficult times in your life, is this easy or hard for you to believe? Do you feel a greater sense of his presence when you are suffering, or does he feel farther off?

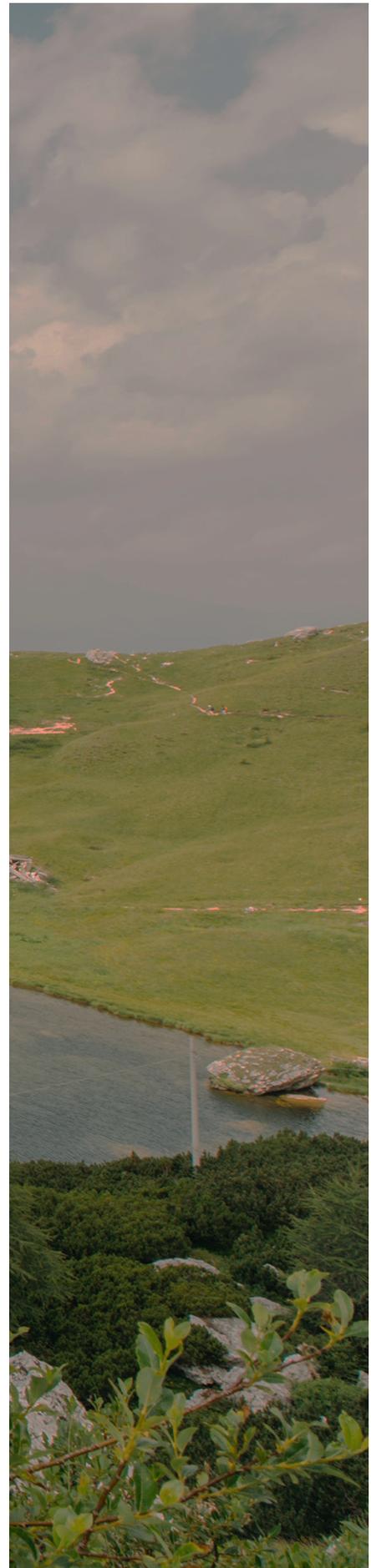
b. Do you find yourself calling on him for help in times of trouble? If not, why?

c. Do you believe that he is all that you need for every situation?

3. In vv. 4-7, the psalmist paints a picture of God’s city (Zion) under siege, yet unshakeable since God dwells in the city, providing for her needs (i.e. the river). How have you seen God provide for your needs in times of trial?

4. Read v. 5. Who does the “her” refer to? (Hint: look at v. 4)

There is a trend to read v. 5 personally, as though the individual is in view. Yet the psalmist is actually referring to the city of God (Zion/Jerusalem). God chose Jerusalem to be his special dwelling place, just as he chose Israel to be his special people, so that through them both, he might bless the world (Gen. 12:1-3; Ex. 19:5-6; Is. 49:6). Because God has chosen Israel and Zion and committed himself to them, the people of God need not fear, for God is with them. He dwells in their midst.



5. Read Ephesians 2:19-22 and 1 Peter 2:4-5. In Jerusalem, God dwelt in the temple. Who does the New Testament say the temple now is? Where does God now dwell?

God Will Be Exalted Among the Nations (vv. 8-11)

6. According to vv. 8-9, who is the one who wins battles and ends wars? How might this offer us comfort in the midst of hard times?

7. What do you think it means to “Be still, and know that I am God” (v. 10)? Who is God speaking to?

8. Read Matthew 28:18-20. What does it mean, according to Matthew, to say that God is with us? What mission will he be with us in?

9. In today’s political climate, many Christians in America worry that they will soon face persecution.

a. How does reading Psalm 46 comfort your heart, despite the fear of persecution?

b. What does Psalm 46 promise the church?

c. What is God’s vision for the church? How do we play our part in his mission?

10. How has studying Psalm 46 affected your heart and soul? How has it changed your view of God? Your view of yourself? What will you do differently this week in light of this psalm?

PSALM 23

Introduction

I'm willing to bet that most of you are familiar with Psalm 23. It's one of those passages that even people who don't know much of anything about Christianity have heard once or twice. Perhaps you've heard it at a memorial service or funeral. Its comfort lies in the intimate way it describes God's care of us—he tends us like a shepherd, and is present with us no matter how dark our circumstances.

I don't know about you, but I often struggle to believe Psalm 23. I don't always believe that God will provide for all of my needs (v. 1). I don't always feel him right beside me in the darkness, ready to defend (v. 4). I certainly don't always believe that my cup is overflowing (v. 5). And that is why I need Psalm 23. Remember that the Psalms are not just theological data that we take in. They are meant to do something to us. Reading and singing them shapes how we think and feel. I may not always believe what David says in Psalm 23, but reading it helps me to. Declaring truth to our hearts actually enables us to believe that truth even more firmly.

But I don't just need to read Psalm 23 myself. I need you to read and sing it to me. God did not create us to do life alone—we need one another. There are times when life is so dark that we simply can't bring ourselves to trust that God is with us and for us. And so we need other people to help us believe. When we recite together a psalm like this, we are declaring what is true about God and who he is, even when our circumstances make us question it. And in declaring it, we are better able to believe. (viii)

Read the Text

Read Psalm 23. Then, read it again more slowly. Consider looking at more than one translation. Underline anything that sticks out to you, paying special attention to any repeated words or phrases. Try to break the psalm into sections, giving each section a summarizing heading. Note any questions or observations in the margins. Pray that God uses this psalm to shape your heart towards his truth.

STUDY AND REFLECT ON THE TEXT

The Lord as Shepherd (vv. 1-4)

1. Over and over again, Scripture uses the metaphor of God as shepherd and his people as sheep (Ps. 95:7, 100:3; John 10:11-18; Rev. 7:17).

a. What does this metaphor communicate to us about God and what he is like? What comes to mind when you think of God as a shepherd?

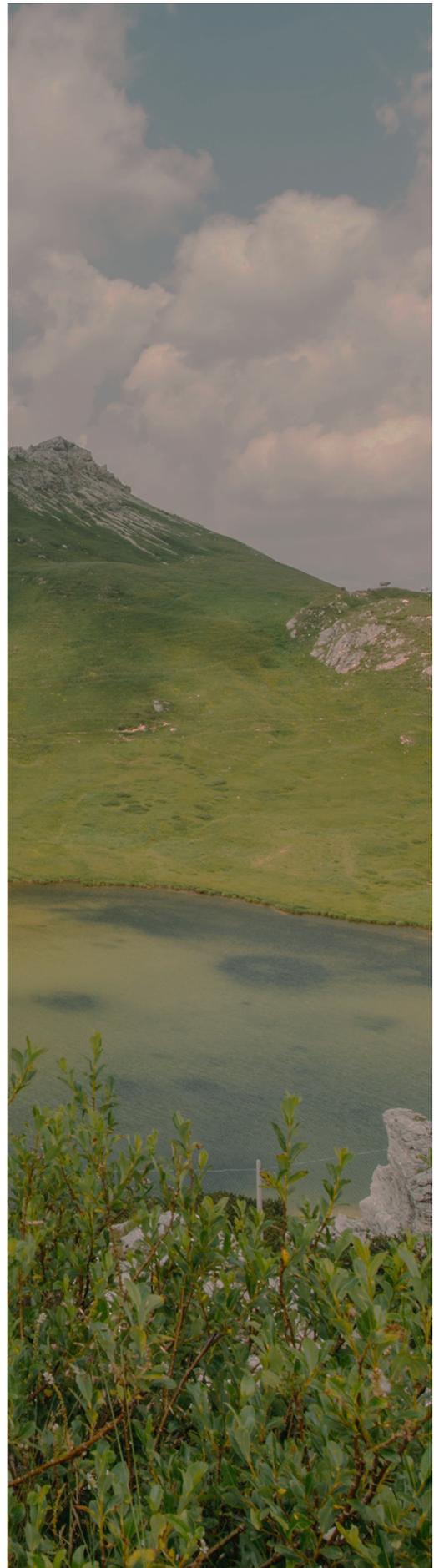
b. What does this metaphor communicate to us about ourselves? In what ways are we like sheep?

2. Because God is our shepherd, the psalmist can say with confidence that, both now and in the future, our needs will be provided for (v. 1). How have you experienced God's care and provision in your life? Where have you seen him meet your needs?

3. The shepherd does not only care for his sheep by providing for their physical needs but also by providing spiritual renewal and moral direction (v. 3). How is moral guidance an aspect of God's care for us?

4. How does the psalmist know that his shepherd will take care of him? Or, to put it another way, what's at stake for God? (Hint: look at the end of v. 3)

Once again, the Psalms point us back to Exodus 34, that pivotal moment in Israel's history where God proclaims his name to Moses, revealing who he is and how he relates to his people. He is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex. 34:6). And it is because this is who God is that the psalmist can trust him. God's name, his reputation, is at stake. He will be true to who he has said he will be.



5. In v. 4, the psalmist shifts from talking about God in the third person (“he”) to the second person (“you”). How does the change in pronouns affect the “feel” of the psalm?

6. Why are the shepherd’s rod and staff a source of comfort to the psalmist when he faces danger (v. 4)? What do these objects do?

The Lord as Host (vv. 5-6)

The psalmist changes metaphors in v. 5, now speaking of God as his host. Meals don’t carry quite the same connotation for us as they did for the original audience: “In the Old Testament world, to eat and drink at someone’s table created a bond of mutual loyalty, and could be the culminating token of a covenant...So to be God’s guest is to be more than an acquaintance, invited for a day. It is to live with him.”(ix) What the psalmist is describing is far more grand and intimate than what we might realize. The God of the universe, who is even now holding the cosmos in order, is at the same time imminently present with us. He has committed himself to us. He wants to live with us. His steadfast love chases after us.

7. When you think about God, do you normally think about him as being close at hand, as Psalm 23 pictures, or does he feel far off? How has Psalm 23 changed the way you view God?

8. What meal does our shepherd invite us to today? (Hint: see 1 Cor. 11:25). What does this meal communicate to us about God’s provision for us?

9. Throughout the Bible, we see that God desires to live with us (John 1:14, Rev. 21:3). He wants to be with us. When you think about what God is doing in the world, do you think about the fact that he wants to be with you? Why or why not?

10. How has studying Psalm 103 affected your heart and soul? How has it changed your view of God? Your view of yourself? What will you do differently this week in light of this psalm?

PSALM 85

Introduction

At first glance, Psalm 85 might seem like a strange addition to a study on comfort. It is, after all, a community lament. We don't know the exact circumstances during which this psalm was written, but it seems that perhaps Israel was experiencing famine as a result of their disobedience and unfaithfulness (and if you know anything about Israel's history, disobedience and unfaithfulness are a recurrent theme). Because of this, they are crying out to God, asking him to forgive their sins once again.

And this is why Psalm 85 is so comforting. For even in the midst of sin, the people have hope that God will forgive. Why? Because it's who he is. He has forgiven their sins in the past (vv. 1-3) because he is the God of salvation and steadfast love (v. 7). It's his nature to show mercy to those who fear him (v. 9). It's because of this that the second half of the psalm (vv. 8-13) is marked by confidence. We know God will speak peace to his people. We know that he will save them. And as people who live on this side of Jesus' coming, we also know how God has ultimately spoken peace, and exactly what it cost him. All God's promises are yes in Jesus Christ. Even in times of trouble, whether of our own making or not, we can have hope that God will remain faithful to his character. We have a bright and glorious future ahead, a future we can depend on because our God is faithful.

Read the Text

Read Psalm 85. Then, read it again more slowly. Consider looking at more than one translation. Underline anything that sticks out to you, paying special attention to any repeated words or phrases. Try to break the psalm into sections, giving each section a summarizing heading. Note any questions or observations in the margins. Pray that God uses this psalm to shape your heart towards his truth.

STUDY AND REFLECT ON THE TEXT

Lord, Once You Showed Favor and Forgave Us (vv. 1-3)

1. In the opening verses of this psalm, the psalmist remembers times in Israel's past where the Lord forgave Israel's sin. Looking back at our study of Psalm 103, what pivotal moment in Israel's history might Psalm 85 be alluding to? (Hint: look back at Ex. 32-34). What was Israel's sin?

2. The psalmist mentions God's "hot anger" and "wrath" (vv. 2-3).

a. Does the idea of the wrath of God make you feel uncomfortable? Why or why not?

b. What might our discomfort with the idea of God's wrath show us about our understanding of sin?

Restore and Forgive Us Again (vv. 4-7)

3. To what does Israel appeal when they ask the Lord for forgiveness (v. 7)? Where have we seen this idea before in the Psalms?

I Will Listen to Hear His Word of Peace (vv. 8-9)

4. Read Isaiah 30:18, Ezekiel 18:32, Hosea 11:8-9, Lamentations 3:30-33, and Exodus 34:6-7.

What is it about God's character that gives the psalmist confidence that God will speak peace to his people?

5. Who benefits from this peace (v. 9)? What does the psalmist warn the people not to do (v. 8)? What does true repentance look like?

6. What comes to mind when you hear the word "saint"? Who does the psalmist have in mind when he speaks of "saints" in v. 8? Do you think of yourself as a saint?



7. Take a look at the following passages: Psalm 63:1-2, Exodus 24:16. What does “glory” represent? What does John 1:14 teach us about this glory? How would you respond to someone who claims that Jesus is not God, based on these passages?

The Lord Will Give What is Good (vv. 10-13)

In the last few verses, the psalmist paints a picture of what it will look like when God speaks peace to his people and brings them salvation. He will dwell in their midst, and the land will flourish. The land will be a place of peace and harmony, a place that reflects the character of God (cf. Ex. 34:6-7). Israel experiences tastes of this peace throughout its history. But they never experience the fullness of this promise. The Old Testament ends with a people longing for a Messiah to make things right again.

8. Take a look at the following passages: Exodus 34:6-7, Luke 2:14, 30-32; Matthew 1:21; John 1:14, 17; Romans 5:1. How does Jesus embody the promise of Psalm 85? (Hint: the Hebrew word for faithfulness can be translated as truth)

9. In Jesus, God has spoken ultimate peace, salvation, and flourishing to his people. While we experience aspects of this peace right now, we still long for the day when everything will be made right. How does knowing the end of the story give you confidence to live through difficult times?

10. How has studying Psalm 85 affected your heart and soul? How has it changed your view of God? Your view of yourself? What will you do differently this week in light of this psalm?

PSALM 12

Introduction

Psalm 12 feels like an especially appropriate one for the world we are in today. One commentator writes, “This is a community lament, suited to occasions when the people of God are dominated by liars in positions of authority.”(x) I don’t know about you, but it certainly feels this way sometimes. On the national level, this past election cycle has revealed that social trust in our nation is rapidly declining. Politicians on both sides of the aisle fail to keep their promises, going back on their word when it is politically expedient. Once trusted news sources are now considered unreliable and corrupt. It is hard to know who is telling the truth. And lest we think that we are safe inside our Christian bubble, the past few months have witnessed the posthumous fall of yet another Christian leader. Deceitful, corrupt leaders infiltrate even the church.

And yet we have hope. For even if the words of everyone else are false, we know that there is one whose words are true. He has promised to defend his people. He hears the cry of the oppressed. He has always proved himself faithful to his promises, even to the point of death. And so we can lament with confidence. Confidence that God is with us and for us. Confidence that he will protect and save his people. Confidence because we know the end of the story, and it ends in victory.

Read the Text

Read Psalm 12. Then, read it again more slowly. Consider looking at more than one translation. Underline anything that sticks out to you, paying special attention to any repeated words or phrases. Try to break the psalm into sections, giving each section a summarizing heading. Note any questions or observations in the margins. Pray that God uses this psalm to shape your heart towards his truth.

STUDY AND REFLECT ON THE TEXT

The Liars Prevail (vv. 1-2)

1. In v. 1, the psalmist cries out for help because no godly people are left around him. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt like this? Where did you go for comfort?

2. The psalmist says that the liars have “flattering lips” and “a double heart.” What do you think he means by this?

May the Lord Cut Off the Liars (vv. 3-4)

3. The wicked in v. 4 are essentially saying that there is no one to hold them accountable for their words. They can lie and get away with it. What parallels can you draw between the situation the psalmist is in and our situation today?

4. Read Exodus 12:19. In light of this passage, what do you think the psalmist is asking God to do in v. 3?

The Reliable Promises of God are Refreshing (vv. 5-6)

5. What does v. 5 show us about God’s heart for the poor and oppressed? Take a look at the following passages: Exodus 2:23-25, 3:7-9; Deuteronomy 15:7-11, 24:14, 17-18; Psalm 9:18, 35:10, 140:12; Isaiah 10:1-4; Jeremiah 22:15-16; Amos 4:1-3. How does God expect his people to treat the poor? What happened when they oppressed the poor?



6. In v. 6, the psalmist says that the Lord's words are pure.

a. What do you think it means to say that God's words are pure? (Hint: Read Tit. 1:2, Heb. 6:18)

b. Why is this such a comforting promise for the psalmist, in light of his circumstances? (Hint: Read Pr. 30:5, Ps. 18:30)

God Will Guard His Faithful (vv. 7-8)

7. What has changed by the end of the psalm? What has not changed?

8. How can we be certain that God will keep his promises? Take a look at 2 Corinthians 1:20. What evidence do we have that God is a promise-keeping God?

9. How might reading a psalm like this reorient our hearts in the midst of troubling times? Upon what foundation should we place our hope?

10. How has studying Psalm 12 affected your heart and soul? How has it changed your view of God? Your view of yourself? What will you do differently this week in light of this psalm?

PSALMS 42-43

Introduction

Psalms 42-43 hit pretty close to home after this past year. We don't know exactly what the situation of the original writer was, but for whatever reason, he was separated from the temple in Jerusalem, unable to worship God in his dwelling place with his fellow Israelites. And while God is in no way confined to one location, he did dwell in a special way in the temple. Even as New Testament believers who are the very dwelling place of God, we still understand that the ability to worship God with his people is a special blessing, one many of us were deprived of in 2020.

Along with being far away from the temple, the psalmist is also oppressed by evil people around him. These two factors combined make the psalmist wonder where God is. In this psalm, we get to witness the inner wrestlings of the person of faith, wrestlings we ourselves have most likely experienced. And the psalmist's response to his turmoil points the way forward for us, when the hardships of this life make us question God's presence with us.

Read the Text

Read Psalm 42-43. Then, read it again more slowly. Consider looking at more than one translation. Underline anything that sticks out to you, paying special attention to any repeated words or phrases. Try to break the psalm into sections, giving each section a summarizing heading. Note any questions or observations in the margins. Pray that God uses this psalm to shape your heart towards his truth.

STUDY AND REFLECT ON THE TEXT

My Soul Pants for God (42:1-5)

1. Psalms 42 and 43 are separate psalms, yet they also go together. Take a look at both psalms. What similarities (themes, phrases, etc.) do you see between the two? How do they differ?

2. What do you think the psalmist is longing for in vv. 2 and 4 (and 43:3-4)? Given the events of the past year, can you relate to his longing?

3. In addition to his inability to worship God in his temple in Jerusalem, what else is it that troubles the psalmist (v. 3)? Have you ever experienced something similar?

Throughout Psalms 42 and 43, we can feel the psalmist wrestling with his faith, as his present circumstances make it hard to believe that God has not abandoned him. In his wrestling, the psalmist actually speaks to his own soul (42:5, 11; 43:5), reminding himself to trust and hope that God will restore him and bring him back to the temple, where God's presence is most fully.

4. When you are in the midst of suffering, do you, like the psalmist, speak encouragement to your own soul? Which of God's promises do you cling to in difficult times?

Has God Forgotten Me? (42:6-11)

5. How does the psalmist respond in v. 6 to the inner turmoil he feels? (Hint: Read Jon. 2:7) How does this set an example for us?



6. In v. 7, the psalmist compares his current situation to the experience of being overwhelmed by waters. Who does he say commands the waters? How might this be a source of both encouragement and discouragement? Who is ultimately in control of the psalmist's current circumstances?

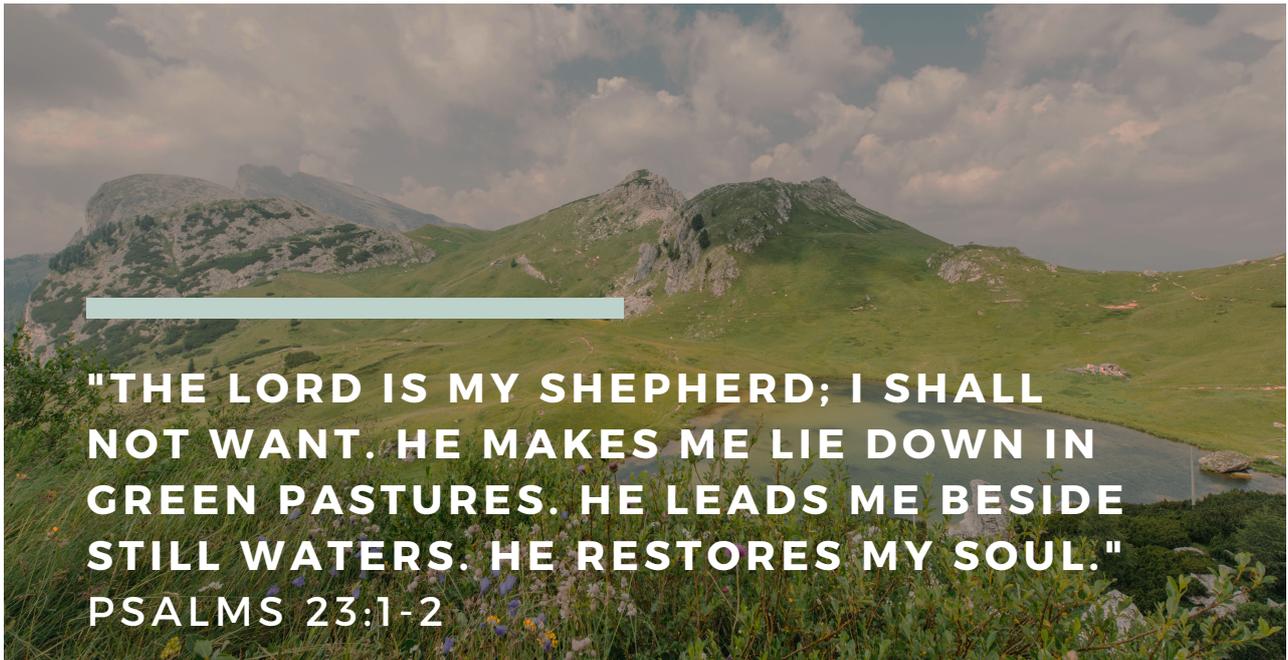
7. What can the psalmist ultimately hope in? What aspect of God's character does the psalmist mention in v. 8?

Vindicate Me So That I Can Come Back to the Temple (vv. 43:1-5)

8. Have the psalmist's external circumstances changed by the end of these two psalms? Do the psalms end with hope or dejection? Why do you think that is?

9. How has studying Psalms 42-43 affected your heart and soul? How has it changed your view of God? Your view of yourself? What will you do differently this week in light of this psalm?

RESOURCES ON THE PSALMS



If you'd like to continue digging into the Psalms and making them a regular part of your spiritual formation, you might enjoy some of the following resources:

- *Praying With the Psalms: A Year of Daily Prayers and Reflections on the Words of David* by Eugene Peterson
- *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* by Eugene Peterson
- *The Songs of Jesus: A Year of Daily Devotions in the Psalms* by Tim Keller
- *Soul Anatomy: Finding Peace, Hope, and Joy in the Psalms* by George Robertson
- *Prayers on the Psalms: From the Scottish Psalter of 1595* by The Banner of Truth Trust
- *The Psalms* by PrayPsalms.org (A Spotify playlist covering all 150 Psalms; <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6ReVzq7fNEvqpTD9VXZkxw>)
- *Psalms We Sing Together* and *Come to Me* by Wendell Kimbrough (Albums)

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- i I'm using "worship" here in a narrow sense here to refer to corporate singing. In a more technical sense, however, the entire service, Call to Worship through Benediction, is considered worship, not just the singing.
- ii C. John Collins, "A Partial Study Guide for Psalms and Wisdom and Worship," Covenant Theological Seminary, 2016, 99.
- iii The theology of the Psalms put forth in this introduction and in the rest of the guide is taken and paraphrased from the writings and teachings of C. John Collins. See C. John Collins, "The Psalms," in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 935-41 esp. 939; C. John Collins, "Always Alleluia: Reclaiming the True Purpose of the Psalms in the Old Testament Context," in *Forgotten Songs: Reclaiming the Psalms for Christian Worship* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2012), 17-34 esp. 26-30; C. John Collins, "A Partial Study Guide for Psalms and Wisdom and Worship," Covenant Theological Seminary, 2016, 99-100. See also John D. Witvliet, "Words to Grow Into: The Psalms as Formative Speech," in *Forgotten Songs: Reclaiming the Psalms for Christian Worship*, Nashville, TN: B&H, 2012.
- iv C. John Collins, study note on Psalm 103, in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 1067.
- v This is not to say that there isn't a place for lament and sorrow—the Psalms make it perfectly clear that it's okay to mourn the brokenness of the world. But we aren't meant to stay there forever.
- vi Unless otherwise noted, the headings and stanza divisions are based on the notes in the *ESV Study Bible*.
- vii God's ways are his "character as it governs his deeds." Collins, study note on Psalm 103, in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 1068.
- viii Cf. Collins, "Always Alleluia: Reclaiming the True Purpose of the Psalms in the Old Testament Context," 29.
- ix Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 15, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (London: IVP, 1973), 130.
- x Collins, study note on Psalm 12, in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 953.