

SESSION 1: PSALM 22

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Psalm 22, Matthew 27:35, 38-43

QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important for us to see Jesus in the books of the Old Testament?
2. The Psalms are often considered the “songs of Jesus.” Why do you think this is?
3. The words of Psalm 22 are parallel to the words that are spoken at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion. What does this tell us about the Bible? What does this tell us about Jesus?
4. Do David’s words in Psalm 22 seem harsh? Have you ever prayed to God in such a way? What could you learn from studying this Psalm?
5. How can lament be turned into praise?
6. How do reading through the Psalms help us today? How can the words written so many years ago fit into our lives?
7. Have you ever felt as if God abandoned you? How did He give you strength to endure? How can you use this journey to help others who question God’s presence?

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SESSION 2: PSALM 51

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Psalm 51, 2 Samuel 11 – 12 / 2018 Autumn Vision – What is Repentance?

QUESTIONS

1. Should our sin cause us pain or distress? Why?
2. The video mentions that awareness of sin, remorse, confession, and resolution are aspects of repentance. How does each element help bring us to repentance? (The Greek word for repentance is *metanoeo*, which means, "rethinking.")
3. How do you confess your sins to God? How could you make that a more regular part of your day?
4. Why are our sins against others actually sins against God as well?
5. Why is it important that we pray for renewal along with forgiveness?
6. God knows us and is aware of all our thoughts and actions. Why do we need to then humble ourselves before Him and confess our sin?
7. At first, David wasn't aware of his sin – God showed it to him through Nathan. What are some ways in which we can become more aware of our sin?
8. The video ends with Psalm 51:12 – *restore to me the joy of Your salvation...* How would you describe "the joy of Your (God's) salvation" to a coworker or neighbor?
9. How can we see Jesus in Psalm 51?

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SESSION 3: PSALM 88

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Psalm 88, Matthew 16:24-25

QUESTIONS

1. Reflecting on the three Psalms we have covered this month – what do they teach you about talking to God during difficult times of your life?
2. The author of Psalm 88 began with the expression, *O Lord, God of my salvation*. What does that phrase tell you about the psalmist's relationship with God? Why is it important for us to know our God?
3. What are some things in your life that hinder you from approaching God as you are?
4. How is Jesus the answer to our feelings of abandonment by God? How does the life and death of Jesus comfort us during trials in our lives?
5. What are examples of ways we can praise God during suffering?
6. **PERSONAL TAKE-HOME:** Take time this week to pray through a Psalm. Pick a chapter of Psalms that you are relating to at this moment in your life. Read each line and pray to God out of the inspiration of those words. Then read the next line, and so on, until you have completed the Psalm. Consider making this a regular part of your daily or weekly prayers.

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SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 1: PSALM 22

Welcome to our first small group session of 2019. In our sessions this month, we'll discover together how we can find an indication of Jesus in the Psalms and how Jesus' knowledge of the Psalms assisted Him during His earthly life.

It may seem odd that we're looking to a book that's found in the Old Testament to look for Jesus, but we need to be conscious that, in fact, the entire Bible points to Him. We can find references to Him throughout the books of the law, the historical books, the books of wisdom, and the writings of the prophets. Many times, Jesus directed the people's attention to what was written about Him so that they would recognize that He was the promised Messiah foretold about for centuries. He brought the words of the Old Testament to their fullest realization.

These things are prevalent in Psalm 22, where we will begin our study this month. Psalm 22 is a psalm of David. It is interesting that it begins with a lament, but by its end, it becomes a psalm of praise. This psalm not only describes an experience that every believer can relate to, but it is also a remarkable and specific prophecy of the suffering of Jesus.

Let's take a look at three passages from this psalm and see how Jesus fulfilled the words of David.

The psalm begins with the following: *My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me? Why are you so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent.* What an agonizing prayer of David. He puts words to his experience of feeling alone and abandoned by God. Jesus echoes these words while on the cross, as recorded for us in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. As Jesus experiences the most dire moment of His life, crucifixion on the cross, the words of the psalmist are on His lips. He seeks a connection with God, the Father, but because of the weight of sin being laid upon Him, the Father seems distant. Jesus uses David's words to express His anguish at that moment. Yet, make a note that David still trusts in his relationship with God, as the use of the words *My God* tell us. He didn't relinquish his knowledge of his God, and he demonstrated his trust in Him to

be faithful and to deliver him. During your times of suffering, how do you call out to God? Do you seek His presence as a loving Father? Are the words of the Scripture on your lips?

Let's continue by looking at verses 6 through 8: *But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, "He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue him; let Him deliver him, since he delights in Him!"* David's faith in God is being challenged by his enemies. He's being mocked for his faith because of the difficult circumstance that he finds himself in. Now listen to the words of Matthew describing the scene at the cross of Jesus: *Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left. And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him..."* (Matthew 27:38-43). The words spoken at the cross help us to realize that the words of the psalmist were prophetic in their foreshadowing of the experience of Jesus. Just like the psalmist, Jesus suffered insults, mocking, and His relationship with God was called into question by others.

Lastly, in verses 16 through 18, Psalm 22 reads: *For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.* Approximately 1,000 years later, these words are echoed in all of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' crucifixion (Matthew 27:35, Mark 15:24, Luke 23:34, John 19:24). Whether aware of it or not, David, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, described his feelings of despair and anguish, and they described what would happen to Jesus. Isn't it incredible how the story of the Bible fits together? When we look at this from our perspective, we could often think, "How could the people of that

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SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 2: PSALM 51

Welcome! We will continue our search for Jesus in the Psalms with Psalm 51. Look up Psalm 51 in your Bibles and follow along with me.

As the title of the Psalm tells us, David wrote this “prayer of repentance” as a response to his sin with Bathsheba and the judgement of God that was brought to him through Nathan the prophet (2 Samuel 11-12). Psalm 51 is one of seven penitential psalms, or psalms of confession. It focuses on David’s personal relationship with God where he expresses the seriousness of his sin and his longing for forgiveness.

There are two parts to the Psalm: a petition for the removal of sin and guilt, and a request for the sinner to be renewed. We can learn a lot about how to deal with our own sin from David’s example. The Psalm also follows the aspects of repentance that were laid out in the 2018 Autumn VISION article titled, *What is Repentance?* We’ll highlight some of those points as we continue.

Let’s look at the very beginning, verse 1: *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness...* Despite all his sins, David knows that he still belongs to God. He knows that he can still turn to God in prayer and that God will not abandon him.

After many pleas for mercy in verses 1 and 2, verse 3 brings us the first aspect of repentance – **awareness**. *For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.* We must start with recognizing our sin and feeling **remorse**, or deep regret and guilt. *My sin is always before me* – this guilt and sorrow was a feeling that consumed David. He could not get away from it.

Verse 4 brings us David’s **confession**: *Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight – that You may be found just when You speak and blameless when You judge.* David is not denying his sin against others (Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah), but when looking at his sin against God, they pale in comparison; for when we sin against others we also sin against God. Nowhere in this prayer does David ask to escape from the material consequences of his sin. He refers to God’s judgement as blameless

– there is no fault in it. David confesses his sin in prayer and then asks for mercy. Note the words in verses 7 and 9: *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow...Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out my iniquities.* David is asking for a complete removal of guilt and sin. We can also see from these verses that he inspired one of our well-known hymns, “Blessed is the peace to my heart.” The chorus, based on these verses in Scripture, focuses our attention on sin and forgiveness.

Going back to verse 5, we see the very depth of the pain and despair that David feels: *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.* David realizes that sin is in his character as a human – it is what he has always been. He is not speaking against his mother, or the process of conception, but rather, that his sins are his own, they are the very element that he lives in. Because of the Fall of Adam and Eve, we cannot live without sinning.

In verses 10 through 12, David prays for renewal: *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit in me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.* David is asking God to make him a new man, which can only be done through the Spirit of God.

Verses 13 through 17 lay out David’s **resolution**. *Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to you...my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness...and my mouth shall show forth Your praise. For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it...The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart – these O God, You will not despise.* Once David is renewed, he will tell others of God’s righteousness; he will praise God for what He has done, and point other sinners to God as the source of salvation and mercy.

A broken and contrite heart is one that knows how little it deserves, yet sees how much it has received. David speaks of a heart that is broken by the grace of God. Through His grace, God shows us our

brokenness, but also opens the way to mercy and forgiveness. In these final verses, we see where we can find Jesus in this Psalm; the mention of sacrifice in verses 16 and 17 points to a need for a sacrifice that can truly blot out sin and send the Holy Spirit to renew. Jesus is that sacrifice. Jesus is the only hope for sinners. Jesus is the One who sent the Holy Spirit to renew us. He is the answer to David's and our prayers for repentance.

Many theologians agree that verses 18-19 were added later, conceivably between the captivity of the Israelites and the rebuilding of the temple, when the Jews possibly used this psalm as a communal prayer of repentance.

In closing, let's read the first part of verse 12 again: *Restore to me the joy of Your salvation...* What a beautiful reminder of all that we have in Christ. The forgiveness and grace that is available to us through His sacrifice, the salvation offered to mankind – the greatness of this should affect us, should give us a deep joy that we can return to, especially when faced with our sin. David's prayer leads us through the journey of repentance, and points us to Christ in the end.

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

2018 Autumn Vision - What is Repentance?

The Greek word for repentance is *metanoeo*, which means, "rethinking." This evokes the idea of completely re-evaluating a matter, which then results in a change of one's direction, condition, or behavior. Repentance is the act of being remorseful for what you have done, turning away from sin, and resolving not to return to that behavior.

In the pre-Reformation church, *metanoeo* was translated as "penance," rather than repentance. Penance is an act of self-abasement or devotion performed to show sorrow or repentance for a sin. This interpretation implies that we are to pay retribution in some way in order to be in right standing with God. The concept of "penance" leads to the false understanding that when we do good works, we can attain some degree of righteousness before God; this is a dangerous path of thinking. Because of our sinful nature, there is **nothing** we

can do to be worthy or righteous in God's eyes. Only Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and His payment for our sins avails us of the grace to be righteous before God.

Yet, repentance comes with a certain amount of suffering; we feel the weight and pain of our sin. When we contemplate that Jesus carried the weight of our sin to the cross, we feel remorse. With the realization that every sin separates us further from God, we recognize the need for His grace and the necessity of repentance to receive forgiveness, so we repent and run back to Him.

In 2 Timothy 2:24-25, we read: ***...if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.***

Therefore, we can appreciate repentance as a gift from God, which opens the way to forgiveness and a close relationship with Him. As we "rethink" and change our minds through repentance, we are led out of darkness, and, with God's help, we allow the new nature of Jesus to unfold within us.

Repentance starts with **awareness**. Often, our sinful nature is not apparent to us. We must stop and take time, perhaps at the end of the day, to meditate, reflect, and examine our thoughts, words, and actions. It's important to explore the underlying reasons for sinful words or actions. Maybe anger or bitterness causes us to speak or act in a way that is hurtful to others. Perhaps fear or doubt causes mistrust or jealousy, or envy leads to hostility, or selfishness creates apathy. We should compare ourselves to the example of Jesus in the Scriptures and notice where we do not align with His nature. Self-examining in this way permits space for God to enlighten us to our sin, so that we become mindful of the sin and its effects on those around us. Only by realizing how far away we actually are from God can we take the steps to move closer to Him.

We find two examples of this God-inspired assessment in Genesis. In chapter 3, after Adam and Eve sin, *the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?"* (Genesis 3:9), and then in chapter 4, when God asks Cain, "What have you done?" to call attention to the terrible deed that Cain, in his self-righteousness, could not recognize.

As human beings, we are sinners and therefore enemies of God and His righteousness. We are perpetually sinful; alone, we cannot climb out of this condition. As He questioned Cain, God questions why we have rebelled and fought against Him. Why have we again allied ourselves to the evil one after our Father has continually approached us with love and compassion? It is an act of grace that He questions us, so that we can see the true perspective of our being and recognize that we are far from Him. God is waiting to forgive us, but we must first see our true state so that we understand our dependence on His grace. We are running in the wrong direction and we need to turn back.

The intended result of the awareness of our sin is **remorsefulness**. Once we come to this understanding, we suffer because the relationship with our God and Father has been disturbed. We sink down into the realization of our sinfulness and distance from God, as David did (2 Samuel 12). We are humbled because we realize that we deserve nothing. We deeply mourn our sinfulness as it is juxtaposed with God's goodness and benevolence.

In this state of unrest and turbulence in our souls, we **confess** our sins to God. Confession is the natural progression as we come to the awareness of and remorsefulness for our sin. Apostle John wrote, If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). This confession does not just happen in the moments of the Lord's Prayer in the divine service, but needs to be wrestled with daily in our prayers.

At our baptism or confirmation, we promised to renounce the evil one and surrender ourselves to the triune God. Remembrance of this promise inspires **our resolution** to keep fighting against sin. Our old nature resists this, but we fight on because we want the new life of Christ to emerge in us and extinguish the old nature that continually drives us away from the One we love. His love inspires a longing and willingness to change and evolve. Even though we may have resolved a hundred or thousand times before, we resolve once again because we know that God will not remember the sins He forgives.

As we experience God's everlasting love for us through the gift of repentance and forgiveness, we come to understand His wish for us to also **forgive others**. If

we want to be close to God, we cannot let pride or self-righteousness stand in our way. Jesus clearly stated in Matthew 6:14-15: *For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.* Although we may have suffered an injustice or terrible offense from our brother, sister, or neighbor, we are resolved to journey down the path toward forgiveness and seek reconciliation. We realize that if God forgives our many sins against Him, then surely, we can strive to forgive the transgressions of others.

Joined with all of our brothers and sisters, with anxious hearts, we express our confessions, feelings, and resolutions to the almighty God, our Father, in the Lord's Prayer. He, alone, is able to restore us and set us on the right path for His is *the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever!*

With a deep longing, we wait for the comfort we find in the absolution. This is the assurance of God's forgiveness and His willingness to always give us a fresh start by the merit of Christ's sacrifice. This greeting of peace gives us the confidence that He will never forsake us, no matter how many times we fall. The words, "The peace of the Risen One be with you all," are like balsam that washes over our troubled souls, and, released from sin, we rest securely in the assurance that the Lord loves and accepts us once again.

Martin Luther, in his 95 theses, said, "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."

The daily journey of realizing our sin and coming to repentance creates a tension in us because the old nature must be slain and supplanted by the new life of Christ. For this newness to grow, it is necessary for us to continually embrace God's gift of repentance.

SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 3: PSALM 88

Welcome to the last small group session for January. In this session, we will explore how Psalm 88 points us to Jesus Christ.

Psalm 88 is a prayer of lamentation, written by Heman the Ezrahite, and we can see that he experiences great troubles in his life. While there is a sense of hope in the first line – *O Lord, God of my salvation* – the rest of Heman's prayer to God is filled with sorrow and anguish.

The psalmist pleads with God to hear his cries. Verses 3 through 9 speak of some of the troubles he is living through – he is near to the grave, he has no strength, he feels God's wrath upon him as if God doesn't care for him anymore, he is separated from his family and friends, and he can't escape his situation.

These verses are almost exactly mirrored in verses 13 through 18. As if it wasn't enough to recount once to God all of these difficulties, this psalmist essentially lists his sorrows all over again. Whether this repetition is because Heman feels the need to impress upon God the seriousness of his situation, or for some other reason, he is truly experiencing a great crisis of faith: in his time of suffering, the psalmist does not feel the presence of God.

It is with this feeling, the feeling that God is absent, that Psalm 88 ends. No hope is expressed and nothing is resolved for the psalmist. There may be situations in life where we have this same feeling; that in our darkest moments, we cry out to God asking where He is, and there is no clear answer or response. And yet, we can always seek God. Even if it doesn't seem like He is there, this Psalm demonstrates to us that God wants to hear our words of desperation, our words of doubt, our words of confusion. He allows us to approach Him as we are. In the midst of our unbelief and our mistrust, we can still come to Him.

This is because even when we don't sense God's presence, we can be assured that He is with us. This is how our prayer to God during suffering differs from the psalmist's prayer. For Heman, his prayer went unanswered. For us, the answer to our prayer is Jesus Christ. We know that we are not alone in our pain and suffering because Jesus experienced it also. As both True God and True Man, He could fully

experience the depths of human emotion. Though Heman believes he had been laid *in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the depths* (Psalm 88:6), Jesus is the One who truly experienced this when He paid the price for our sin. When we are in the middle of our own suffering, it may seem like nothing could be worse, but as Christians, we know that we will never truly experience the "lowest pit" because Jesus went there in our place. No matter how low we may feel, we are not alone. There's no place we could go that Jesus can't also go with us.

Every follower of Jesus must bear their cross if they are to have hope of eternal life (Matthew 16:24-25). Psalm 88 reminds us of our cross, but because of Jesus, we can have hope for our future. With our Savior in mind, we are encouraged that one day we will be restored and the difficulties we face will disappear.

While it is hard to be focused on the good things that God has promised for our future during sorrow or suffering, we need such moments. It is when we feel abandoned by Him that we realize He is the One we can completely depend on. Even this psalmist cried out to God in the midst of his troubles, praying to Him and seeking His presence. And so, in the middle of intense grief or trials, let us always resolve to continue in prayer and praise God.

In Psalm 88:10-11, Heman writes, *Will You work wonders for the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise You? Shall Your lovingkindness be declared in the grave? Or Your faithfulness in the place of destruction?* We could understand that Heman perhaps wrote these words in a taunting way. But we believe that the answers to these questions are yes! God's faithfulness and lovingkindness are declared to all, both the living and those in the beyond. We can worship God through our times of despair because the Holy Spirit assures us of our future. We are victorious through Christ! Even when we are in the darkest pit, we look to Him.