



ECHOES

Adult Student Book
Comprehensive Bible Study
September–November 2024



Worship in the Covenant
Studies in Genesis, Exodus, 1 Kings, 2 Kings,
2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Psalms, John

ECHOES

Adult Student Book Comprehensive Bible Study A Bible Study Quarterly for Adults

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September, October, November 2024
(Studies in Genesis, Exodus, 1–2 Kings,
2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Psalms)

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What's Ahead

Quarterly Preview

The lessons this quarter are a study of worship practices offered as a grateful response to the covenantal relationship God initiates, first with Abraham, and later with the people of Israel. The patterns of worship reflect the gamut of community life, from praising God's goodness and mercy to calling on God for help in times of crisis.

Unit 1 observes how various leaders of the Israelite people honored God through their worship. These examples include Abraham, Solomon, Hezekiah, and Josiah.

Unit 2 looks at various songs in the Old Testament that Israel used in worship and prayer.

Unit 3 looks at five songs from the Hebrew psalter (fitting the U.S. calendar in its season of thanksgiving). In order, we look at Psalm 23, Psalms 146 and 150, Psalm 100, and Psalm 139.

In this quarter, here are some biblical principles you will study and apply to the situations in your own life:

- Wherever you live, honor God there.
- Forgive us, Lord, when we sin against you.
- Pray for God's deliverance to be known in all the earth.
- Now and always, remember why you worship God.
- In what ways can you celebrate our God?
- Let God cleanse you completely through repentance.
- Continue to cry to God—no matter how far away He seems.
- Invite all peoples to the feast of the Lord.
- Let your soul find rest in the "rock."
- I will not fear with God as my shepherd.
- What can you praise God for?
- Enter God's presence with joy, praise, and thanksgiving.
- Be in awe of our ever-present God.

Abram Builds an Altar at Mamre

I was wondering when you were going to put up some kind of decoration,” said Jhamir to his roommate, Xavier. “Is that your hand?”

Xavier smiled. “Yes. It is.”

The two young men had been in their dorm room for two and a half weeks, and Xavier still had a box of belongings to unpack. He and Jhamir had hit it off and were quickly become friends. Xavier believed the two would be good roommates. Jhamir was from Chicago and the first of his family to go to college. He planned to major in mechanical engineering. Xavier was from Kansas City, Missouri, and he was a third-generation college student who planned to become a screenwriter.

The picture Jhamir was examining showed Xavier’s right hand—his writing hand—laying palm up on a piece of old wood. A nail had been graphically superimposed on his wrist, with blood oozing around it. The effect was to look like a closeup of a hand on a cross.

Xavier had created the image before coming to college, something he knew would remind him of his Savior. He wanted to honor God and to use the picture to remember that wherever he went, all his hard work and talent were dedicated to the Lord.

“It looks like your hand is on a cross,” said Jhamir. “That’s pretty cool.”

“It’s my way of honoring my Lord wherever I happen to be,” Xavier responded. “I’m glad you like it too.”

- 1.** *Why does God deserve our honor in all that we do?*
- 2.** *Do you find it easier to meet with God in a particular place? If so, where?*
- 3.** *How does trust in God help you to honor Him wherever you go?*

Abram Lets Lot Choose

Genesis 13:8-13 KJV

8 And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren.

9 Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.

10 And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.

11 Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.

12 Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

13 But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.

Genesis 13:8-13 NIV

⁸So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herd-ers and mine, for we are close relatives. ⁹Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."

¹⁰Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)

¹¹So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: ¹²Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. ¹³Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.

Abram is not willing to quarrel over land with his nephew. When Abram sees an issue between their hired hands,

his first response is to remind Lot of their familial connection. He diplomatically offers Lot the first choice of where to take his people. Abram's decision to let Lot choose where to reside shows his desire to make peace. And this is no ordinary plot of land. When God promised Abram land, He promised him an inheritance that would belong to his descendants forever. God would keep His promises.

After Lot looked around to inspect which direction was best, he discerned that the land to the east, Jordan toward Zoar, was better (vv. 10–11). The text says that Jordan toward Zoar was well-watered "like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt" (v. 10). While Lot's choice may seem like the right one, he actually chose poorly. A decision to separate from Abram, rather than follow him, would lead to Lot's loss of nearly everything, including his wife and wealth. His family line would survive only because he committed incest with his own daughters (Gen. 19:30–38).

Lot chose the land "toward the east." In Genesis, eastward movement is sometimes presented as movement away from God's presence. The text compares the land to "the garden of the LORD." Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden for their disobedience and placed on its east side, away from God's presence (Gen. 3:24). The land is also compared to Egypt, ironic given that Egypt would be inhospitable to Abram's descendants. Finally, the narrator mentions a subsequent destruction of Lot's wealth in verse 10: "This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah."

Through Lot's choice, God spared Abram and gave him the land that was better suited for his inheritance. Though it seemed like Abram and Lot were in control, God was the one working all things for His glory and Abram's good. Lot's chosen land was not what it seemed. While it had well-watered soil, the people in the land were wicked and sinning against God. Abram stayed in the land of Canaan, but Lot chose to live in the land of Sodom.

4. *Why does Abram let Lot choose the “best” plot of land?*

5. *Why does Lot choose to settle in the land to the east?*

6. *What does the story of Abram and Lot teach us about honoring God?*

Abram Builds an Altar at Mamre

Genesis 13:14–18 KJV

14 And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

16 And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

17 Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

18 Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD.

Genesis 13:14–18 NIV

¹⁴The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, “Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. ¹⁵All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. ¹⁶I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.

¹⁷Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.”

¹⁸So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents. There he built an altar to the LORD.

God called Abram’s family out of the land of Ur to bring them to the land of Caanan. In Genesis 12:1–2, God said “Go” and made a promise that He would bless Abram. Verses 14–17 show God’s continued blessings for

him. Once he is alone after Lot has departed, God makes a specific promise of territory in the land of Canaan. God will give all that his eyes can see and wherever his feet can walk (vv. 14, 17). God also reiterates an even greater promise, that Abram shall have future children, so many that they will be like particles of dust (v. 16). Lot was not going to be Abram's heir; God had a much better plan. Isaac will be the child of promise from God.

In response to God's great provision and promise, Abram moved his tent to Mamre at Hebron (v. 18). Abram comes to a grove of "great trees" at Mamre. Ironically, despite Lot's selfish attempt to choose the well-watered place when he left Abram, God brings Abram to a home with plenty of water—springs and wells and enough to support large trees and vegetation. In gratitude to God's provision, Abram constructs an altar for God. An altar is not only a place of sacrifice but also a monument, a place of remembrance.

By building an altar, Abram was marking the significance of this particular place. The altar was evidence of God's provision—visual evidence for all to see. God would appear to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre, where he and Sarah offer hospitality to three heavenly visitors (Gen. 18:1–15). Abraham and Sarah will be buried in a cave near their home in this place (Gen. 23:19; 25:9). And when the Israelites return, Hebron will be the place where David is anointed as king (2 Sam. 5:3).

No matter where Abram went, God remained faithful and kept His promises. When the land to the east seemed better, God was able to provide a home. Even though Abram and Sarai were too old to have children, God would soon bless them with a child and a large family. God is always faithful to His promises.

- 7.** *What promises to Abram does God make (vv. 14–17)?*
- 8.** *How does God show faithfulness to Abram?*
- 9.** *Why does Abram build an altar?*

Wherever

Christina's church observed that she honored God by being generous with her time. When something needed to be done, she did it. She was an encouraging person. Work was another story. There, she was like any other employee, complaining and grumbling about her supervisor. She'd take supplies from the office. She often returned late from her lunch break. Her coworkers didn't know about her faith. They certainly didn't see Jesus through her actions.

James demonstrated his love for God at work. But he struggled to honor the Lord when he went out to the sports bar with old friends. James joined them in shouting and cussing at the game. He became so absorbed in the game that he'd drink too much and would have to be driven home.

Sherri honored God in almost all places and times. But she was like a different person on vacation. When she went on an excursion and met handsome men, Sherri was careful not to mention her faith. She was focused on enjoying herself, and Sherri's behavior changed.

Christina, James, and Sherri loved the Lord and knew how to honor Him in certain environments. But they didn't understand that honoring God isn't like changing clothes.

In every place and with every action, we are either pointing others to God, or, to something else. That something else is usually ourselves. We can try to make ourselves the center; or we can choose to live like Jesus, who was never too busy to consider the needs of others.

10. *What can make it difficult to honor God in various situations?*

11. *Why is it important to honor God wherever you are?*

12. *What can you do to remind yourself to honor God wherever you are?*

Is It a Lifestyle?

Do you compartmentalize your life? Do you act one way at church, but you let another side show to the people at work? Are there occasions when you use coarse language to run others down? Do you forget to be gracious? Jesus died for our sins that we might be transformed and live a life that honors Him, wherever and whenever. God doesn't want us to compartmentalize our lives but to intentionally honor Him by how we live each day.

► *What can you do throughout your day to intentionally honor Him? Write two things you will do this next week to honor God.*

KEY VERSE

And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. —Genesis 13:18 KJV

So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives." —Genesis 13:18 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of September 2 through September 8

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Romans 8:18–28—Sighs Too Deep for Words.
- Tue.** Psalm 34:11–22—God Hears Our Cry for Help.
- Wed.** Nehemiah 12:27–30, 44–47—Celebrate with Rejoicing, Thanksgiving, and Singing.
- Thu.** 2 Chronicles 7:12–22—Bring Your Requests Before God.
- Fri.** Luke 11:1–13—Lord, Teach Us to Pray.
- Sat.** 1 Kings 8:22–24, 27–30, 37–43—God the Promise Keeper.
- Sun.** 1 Kings 8:44–53—Hear Our Plea and Grant Compassion.

Solomon Dedicates the Temple

Alana sat on her large, screened-in back porch. Around her were the remains of a belated Labor Day party for her sister. Various bowls of chips, dips, and assorted snacks lay around on flat surfaces, with red plastic cups crowded around them. The two trash cans were overflowing with paper plates, and streamers and a few popped balloons were strewn across the floor.

It was 5 a.m., and she was sipping her coffee and sitting quietly before her family rose. It gave her a chance to reflect on the night before.

What had gotten into her? Why had she embellished so? Well—lied really. Alana had found herself put on the spot. Alana had joined a conversation where people were reminiscing of adventures during college days. Truth is, Alana hadn't any real adventures during her college years, at least not the kind that were being shared. So to fit in, she made up some. She was a writer after all, a good one. Good thing, though, that her husband wasn't around to hear her. Shaun would have said, "I've never heard this story before!" Still, she thought, it may get back to him.

What had she done? She had lied. She had sinned. All because she wanted to look exciting in the eyes of others.

"Lord, please forgive me," Alana prayed. "Recreate in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me. And help me with this mess."

1. *Do you have trouble accepting God's forgiveness? Why or why not?*

2. *How easy is it for you to forgive others when they wrong you?*

3. *Why is it sometimes easier to forgive strangers or acquaintances than family members?*

God Keeps His Promises

1 Kings 8:22–24 KJV

22 And Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven:

23 And he said, LORD God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart:

24 Who hast kept with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him: thou spakest also with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day.

1 Kings 8:22–24 NIV

²²Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven ²³and said:

“LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way. ²⁴You have kept your promise to your servant David my father; with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it—as it is today.”

The setting is Solomon’s dedication of the newly-built temple devoted to the Lord God. Solomon gathered all Israel for a feast, and the priests brought the ark of the covenant into the most holy place (1 Kings 8:1–9). The glory of God’s presence filled the temple like a cloud (vv. 10–11); and Solomon lifted his heart, hands, and voice to the Lord in prayer and supplication while standing before the altar (v. 22). He acknowledged the uniqueness of our awesome God. There is none like Him in heaven or on earth.

Solomon continues his prayer by recognizing God’s faithfulness in keeping His promises to His people. The “promise” (v. 24) to which Solomon refers is what God told King David concerning the temple. Even though David wanted to build a house for the Lord, God forbade it. Instead, God promised that David’s son would build it.

We know that God is faithful to keep all His promises.

Because of who He is—His faithfulness to His promises and willingness to hear and answer prayer—His people have every reason to come to Him. Like Solomon, we can worship the Lord and thank Him for what He has done. When we bring our supplications to Him, we know that He will answer and provide what is best.

4. *Where is Solomon when he begins this prayer of dedication?*

5. *What does Solomon first acknowledge about the Lord?*

6. *To what specific promise of God does Solomon refer (v. 24)?*

God Knows Our Hearts

1 Kings 8:37–39 KJV

37 If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, or if there be caterpillar; if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities; whatsoever plague, whatsoever sickness there be;

38 What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house:

39 Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men;)

1 Kings 8:37–39 NIV

³⁷“When famine or plague comes to the land, or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers, or when an enemy besieges them in any of their cities, whatever disaster or disease may come, ³⁸and when a prayer or plea is made by anyone among your people Israel—being aware of the afflictions of their own hearts, and spreading out their hands toward this temple— ³⁹then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive and act; deal with everyone according to all they do, since you know their hearts (for you alone know every human heart).”

This part of Solomon's prayer concerns God's warning, given centuries earlier. After wandering in the wilderness, Moses brought the people to the edge of the promised land. He challenged them to be faithful to the Lord and to stay away from false gods. Faithfulness to their God and His commands would bring blessing (Deut. 28:1–14). Unfaithfulness would bring curses and plagues: famine, swarms of crop-devouring locusts, defeat and oppression by cruel enemies (Deut. 28:15–44). Solomon foresees that God's people will face these consequences (1 Kings 8:37). Although sin's consequences are harsh, they are meant to prompt the people of God to repent and to be restored.

Thankfully, we can ask God to forgive us and receive us back to Himself. God knows our hearts, and He will never turn away a repentant sinner.

7. *What kinds of calamities would bring famine to the land?*

8. *What makes an effective prayer of confession and repentance?*

9. *How will God respond to a sinner's contrition of heart?*

God Forgives Our Sins

1 Kings 8:46, 48-50a KJV

46 If they sin against thee, (for there is no man that sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captives unto the land of the enemy, far or near;

48 And so return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, which led them

1 Kings 8:46, 48-50a NIV

⁴⁶When they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you become angry with them and give them over to their enemies, who take them captive to their own lands, far away or near. . . . ⁴⁸and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies who

away captive, and pray unto thee toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name:

49 Then hear thou their prayer and their supplication in heaven thy dwelling place, and maintain their cause,

50a And forgive thy people that have sinned against thee.

took them captive, and pray to you toward the land you gave their ancestors, toward the city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name; ⁴⁹then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their plea, and uphold their cause. ^{50a}And forgive your people, who have sinned against you."

Our God is gracious and long-suffering, but also fair. He will deal with sin. Many people deny being a sinner; but His Word says, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Denying sin will bring us no closer to restoration with God.

God promised that, should His people turn to other gods, He would give them over to their enemies. If God's people serve the gods of other nations, those foreign nations with their idols would become oppressors. Apart from God, sin consumes people; and sin has consequences.

But as Solomon's prayer indicates, people in the chains of bondage to sin do not have to stay there. We can cry out to our gracious God, and He will hear us. God's people would be heard when they cried out from the temple of Jerusalem. And because God's presence now dwells in us who have faith in Jesus, we can cry out to God from any place. God will hear the repentant person's faith-filled prayer, and God sets that person free from slavery to sin.

10. *What does Solomon observe about people and their inclination to sin?*

11. *When God's people sin, what does He do about it?*

12. *What is the only hope for those taken captive by the enemy of sin?*

Seventy Times Seven

Forgiveness is a crucial element of the Christian walk. Without it, none of us would be saved. Sin is detestable in God's sight, and the only appropriate punishment is death. No matter what sin we've committed or how "bad" it is compared to someone else's, we deserve to be sentenced to death row, if not for God's forgiveness and plan of salvation.

Too often, we downplay the reach of sin in our lives and think of ourselves as decent human beings. When you take into consideration all the murderers and rapists in prison, surely a little jealousy or a "white lie" isn't that bad, right? Wrong! This is dangerous thinking, for we start to operate out of a place of pride, rather than humility. Without Jesus in your life, who's to say that you wouldn't become one of those same criminals you just condemned? Anyone who has accepted Christ as their Lord is a recipient of incredible grace. We are to be ambassadors of God's forgiveness, telling the world what God has done for us.

In no way does this make it simple to forgive others, but it sets the standard. This week I heard a preacher say, "You can't be a recipient of mercy, yet demand justice for those who've wronged you." Many of us have endured heart-wrenching situations that weren't fair, that no one should have to experience. It's okay to acknowledge your feelings of hurt, despair, or injustice. Leave them at the feet of Jesus and move forward in forgiveness. If you don't, that unforgiveness will grow into bitterness and resentment and harm you and your relationship with God.

13. *What is the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?*

14. *Is it possible to forgive someone who isn't sorry? Why or why not?*

15. *What is something you need to confess to the Lord and repent of today?*

Forgiveness Over Justice

Forgiveness is hard. You may be thinking, *You don't know what so-and-so did to me; that person does not deserve forgiveness!* True, but you don't deserve forgiveness either. None of us do. That's the whole point of grace—getting the opposite of what we deserve. We receive a blessing when we deserve a curse, abundant life instead of death.

► *How have you experienced great forgiveness in your life—whether by God or someone you know? Who is someone that you need to extend the same forgiveness toward?*

KEY VERSES

What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place.

—1 Kings 8:38–39a KJV

And when a prayer or plea is made by anyone among your people Israel—being aware of the afflictions of their own hearts, and spreading out their hands toward this temple— then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. —1 Kings 8:38–39a NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of September 9 through September 15

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Romans 8:29-39—We Are More than Conquerors through Christ.
- Tue.** 2 Corinthians 4:8-18—Do Not Lose Heart.
- Wed.** Psalm 69:1-15—God Protects Me.
- Thu.** Psalm 69:16-21, 29-36—The Lord Hears the Needy.
- Fri.** 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5—God Will Strengthen and Guard You.
- Sat.** 2 Kings 19:14-19—A Humble Prayer for Help.
- Sun.** 2 Kings 19:20-31—God Is a Powerful Defender.

Hezekiah's Prayer

Levi turned when his wife, Nadia, reached for his hand. The jury had been deliberating for two hours.

Levi was on administrative leave as an assistant basketball coach at the nearby public state university. A group of parents had brought charges against him and the college, saying Levi had violated their sons' civil rights.

Levi had been a coach for almost half of his 52 years. He loved the sport and enjoyed mentoring young men. The boys who didn't have a father figure in their lives seemed especially drawn to Levi.

Today's case was about three boys. They met with Levi outside of practice hours and talked. Many times, those discussions ended in prayer. The case hadn't been brought by the families of those boys but by parents of others on the team. It had gotten out that Levi was praying with some of the players he was coaching, and the news was upsetting to some parents.

"We are praying that the jury will find you not guilty, your job will be restored, and His name will get all the glory for your deliverance," Pastor Thomas had said the Sunday before the trial began.

Two months later, Levi was in his office immersed in his email when his head swiveled toward the tap on the door.

"I didn't want to disturb you," said Gary, a football coach. "I heard you won your case, and the university let you come back. That had to be God!"

1. *How are you contributing to sharing God's deliverance with the world?*

2. *What do you think it means for something to be known "in all the earth"?*

3. *How would you rate your current prayer life on a scale of 1–10? Why?*

God Hears from Heaven

2 Kings 19:14–16 KJV

14 And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD.

15 And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said, O LORD God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth.

16 LORD, bow down thine ear, and hear: open, LORD, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God.

2 Kings 19:14–16 NIV

¹⁴Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD. ¹⁵And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: "LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.

¹⁶Give ear, LORD, and hear; open your eyes, LORD, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God."

Hezekiah took the threatening letter from the Assyrian king Sennacherib to the temple and spread it out before the Lord. Sharing the letter showed Hezekiah's sincerity and anguish because of the letter's contents. As he would before an earthly judge, the king spread out the evidence before the Lord. With the evidence presented to the judge, the king begins his plea by acknowledging God's majesty and power. Unlike the false gods of the other nations, which were made by their worshipers' hands, Judah's God is creator of all, and He is the one who made all the people of the earth.

After acknowledging God's splendor and might, Hezekiah pleads with the Lord to hear his prayer, to "listen" (v. 16). The basis for the king's plea was not the dire straits that Judah and Jerusalem were in, though of course that was prominent in the mind of the king. Rather,

Hezekiah says the very honor of God's holy name was at stake. The Assyrian king had confused the true God with the false gods of the surrounding nations and mocked Him. Was God powerless to save? There can be no greater basis for the prayers of God's people than His honor and holy reputation. For instance, we know from Scripture that God is faithful to His promises. We can remember God's promises when we pray, and this teaches us to trust Him.

4. *How do you respond when people insult God's name?*
5. *How did the Judah's king respond to the message?*
6. *What does he ask of the Lord?*

God's Answers from Heaven

2 Kings 19:17–20 KJV

17 Of a truth, LORD, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands,

18 And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them.

19 Now therefore, O LORD our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD God, even thou only.

20 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard.

2 Kings 19:17–20 NIV

¹⁷"It is true, LORD, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. ¹⁸They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands. ¹⁹Now, LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, LORD, are God."

²⁰Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent a message to Hezekiah: "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I have heard your prayer concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria."

Sennacherib's letter said that the gods from all other nations were not able to protect them from the conquering Assyrians. As a pagan and worshiper of other gods himself, the Assyrian king felt proud that even so-called gods offered no protection from his armies. He attributed it to his strength and the superiority of Assyria's gods.

However, Hezekiah knew the truth: those "gods" of the surrounding nations were not gods at all, but merely idols made by the hands of their worshipers. A piece of wood or stone cannot offer help or stave off defeat in battle.

Since he knew that idols offered false hope, Hezekiah pleads with God to deliver Judah and Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib, but not only because he fears death and destruction. Hezekiah's prayer is not that he wants God to help him to avoid suffering. The king has a higher concern in mind: God's good name. Whereas nations with false gods fell to Assyria, the Lord's deliverance of His people would proclaim that He is the one true God.

After Hezekiah's prayer, the prophet Isaiah sent a message of the good news. God heard the king's prayer.

7. *How does Hezekiah contrast the gods of the other nations with Israel's God?*

8. *Why does Hezekiah want the Lord to deliver His people?*

9. *What was the prophet Isaiah's message to Hezekiah?*

God's Zeal Will Be Known

2 Kings 19:29–31 KJV

29 And this shall be a sign unto thee, Ye shall eat this year such things as grow of themselves, and in the second year that which springeth of the same; and in the third

2 Kings 19:29–31 NIV

²⁹"This will be the sign for you, Hezekiah:

"This year you will eat what grows by itself, and the second year what springs from that.

But in the third year sow and

year sow ye, and reap,
and plant vineyards, and
eat the fruits thereof.

30 And the remnant that
is escaped of the house of
Judah shall yet again take
root downward, and bear
fruit upward.

31 For out of Jerusalem
shall go forth a remnant,
and they that escape out
of mount Zion: the zeal
of the LORD of hosts shall
do this.

reap,
plant vineyards and eat their
fruit.

³⁰Once more a remnant of the
kingdom of Judah
will take root below and bear
fruit above.

³¹For out of Jerusalem will come a
remnant,
and out of Mount Zion a band
of survivors.

“The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.”

The Lord gives Hezekiah a sign of His promise to deliver Judah. With the Assyrians surrounding them, there was little opportunity to grow crops. As a sign to His faithfulness, for two years the land would grow sufficient food without cultivation. Then, in the third year, the people would sow and reap to feed themselves. God would preserve a remnant of people from Judah to resettle the land, for His glory. This would be accomplished by the Lord’s “zeal” (v. 31). The Hebrew word for “zeal” communicates the idea of God’s holy jealousy for His people. His love would accomplish all He promises.

We also rely on our God to deliver us. Through faith in Christ, our deliverance from the bonds of sin is every bit as real as Jerusalem’s deliverance in Hezekiah’s day. It is God’s love that provides the way of salvation. Those who are saved by grace through faith have the great privilege of spreading the message of God’s deliverance around the world. Let us pray that the gospel will go forth with great zeal. Let us pray that we might understand our part.

10. *What was the sign that God gave to Hezekiah?*

11. *What would a remnant of the house of Judah do?*

12. *How will God’s promises be accomplished?*

Being Persistent in Prayer

Every believer knows that prayer is a vital part of the Christian walk. It is how we commune with God our Father, and what relationship can grow without communication? Back in the Old Testament, when the Israelites wanted to pray, they relied on priests to pray on their behalf and to enter the presence of God; the most Holy Place was full of God's presence. But since Jesus came and died for our sins, He tore the curtain that was dividing us from God and made the Father accessible to all of us, every moment of the day (Mark 15:38). There is no longer a need for a high priest or an animal sacrifice, for Jesus is our High Priest and the Lamb of God (John 1:29). Those roles have been fulfilled for perpetuity. We have full and open access to God.

In our "I-need-it-now" world, we expect God to answer our prayers now, like a genie in a bottle. We liken praying to ordering something online and waiting for it to arrive at our door. That's not how God works. True, there are instances of immediate healing and miracles that happen before our eyes. But most of the time, prayer involves waiting—for the right timing, for the right next opportunity, for the next door to open. And sometimes we think that God didn't hear us, or God says no. If it seems like the answer isn't coming—or not the answer we expected—we must trust that God sees variables that we do not.

God's timing is always perfect. If we pray for His will to be accomplished in all circumstances, we know it will be when the time is right. In the meantime, we keep praying and encouraging one another in the faith.

13. *What prayers of yours feel unanswered?*

14. *What is the biggest answer to prayer you've witnessed?*

15. *How often do you spend time in prayer and quiet reflection? What does your prayer routine look like?*

Keep Praying

Hezekiah's prayer goes through four stages: he began with praise; he presented the issue; he confidently reflected on God's power; and he recognized his need for God's deliverance. God hears you, and He is honored by your faithful prayers.

▶ *Write a prayer for the coming week, following Hezekiah's model.*

▶ *Praise:*

▶ *Your request:*

▶ *God's power to deliver:*

▶ *Your need for God's deliverance:*

KEY VERSE

Now therefore, O LORD our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD God, even thou only. —2 Kings 19:19 KJV

Now, LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, LORD, are God. —2 Kings 19:19 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSONS

Week of September 16 through September 22

(See *The Quiet Hour and Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

Mon. 1 Corinthians 5—Abstain from Immorality.

Tue. Revelation 5:6–14—Worthy Is the Lamb!

Wed. 2 Chronicles 34:8, 14–27—God Forgives Those Who Repent.

Thu. Psalm 85—Restore Us Again, O God.

Fri. Ephesians 5:3–14—Living in the Light of Christ.

Sat. Exodus 12:3–17—A Day of Celebration.

Sun. 2 Chronicles 35:1–6, 16–19—Sanctify Yourselves.

Josiah Celebrates Passover

Kendra bit down hard on her teeth, keeping her mouth closed. Rehearsal had run 45 minutes over! The church's air conditioning had stopped working. Emotions were frayed, and the music director was on a rant.

"Do we want to embarrass the pastor and ourselves?" asked Shakira, the director. "I want this song perfect!"

Part of the problem was that the person who should be leading the song, Angelo, wasn't leading. Shakira had given the lead to her nephew, Omari, who couldn't sing as well. There was dissension, moodiness, and irritability. How were they to lift a joyful noise unto the Lord?

Kendra had been biting her tongue throughout the rehearsal. She had also been fighting back a headache for the last hour. The atmosphere saddened her, and she knew it grieved God's heart.

"Sister Shakira, can we stop and pray?" asked Montrell, one of the tenors. "I don't know about everyone else, but I am getting irritable. This is not showtime at the Apollo. This is worship."

Shakira looked politely rebuffed, but asked Montrell to lead the choir and musicians in prayer.

"Father God, thank You for Your mercy, grace, and longsuffering," prayed Montrell. "We are grateful for Your Son, Jesus, and our salvation through Christ's blood. We ask that You forgive us of our sins and that You be glorified through our worship. In Jesus' name, amen."

- 1.** *What are some of the ways you like to worship God?*
- 2.** *Has there been a time you found yourself worshipping God spontaneously in public or private? If so, why do you think this happened?*
- 3.** *Why is it easy for us to worship God and not focus on why we are worshipping Him?*

Serve the Lord Your God

2 Chronicles 35:1–6 KJV

1 Moreover Josiah kept a passover unto the LORD in Jerusalem: and they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month.

2 And he set the priests in their charges, and encouraged them to the service of the house of the LORD,

3 And said unto the Levites that taught all Israel, which were holy unto the LORD, Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel did build; it shall not be a burden upon your shoulders: serve now the LORD your God, and his people Israel,

4 And prepare yourselves by the houses of your fathers, after your courses, according to the writing of David king of Israel, and according to the writing of Solomon his son.

5 And stand in the holy place according to the divisions of the families of the fathers of your brethren the people, and after the division of the families of the Levites.

6 So kill the passover, and sanctify yourselves, and prepare your brethren, that they may do according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

2 Chronicles 35:1–6 NIV

¹Josiah celebrated the Passover to the LORD in Jerusalem, and the Passover lamb was slaughtered on the fourteenth day of the first month. ²He appointed the priests to their duties and encouraged them in the service of the LORD's temple. ³He said to the Levites, who instructed all Israel and who had been consecrated to the LORD: "Put the sacred ark in the temple that Solomon son of David king of Israel built. It is not to be carried about on your shoulders. Now serve the LORD your God and his people Israel. ⁴Prepare yourselves by families in your divisions, according to the instructions written by David king of Israel and by his son Solomon.

⁵"Stand in the holy place with a group of Levites for each subdivision of the families of your fellow Israelites, the lay people. ⁶Slaughter the Passover lambs, consecrate yourselves and prepare the lambs for your fellow Israelites, doing what the LORD commanded through Moses."

Second Chronicles 34–35 parallel 2 Kings 22–23. Both texts introduce the reign of King Josiah over Judah. Many of the kings of Judah and Israel did not follow God’s commands, including Josiah’s father, King Amon. He had encouraged worship at the “high places,” which were worship centers for false gods mentioned many times in Scripture. These were often located on mountains and hills (thought to be closer to heaven).

Josiah was only eight years old when he became king. Second Chronicles 34:3 says, “In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David. In his twelfth year, he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of high places, Asherah poles, and idols.” In the eighteenth year of his reign, the “Book of the Law of the LORD” was found and read to Josiah. He was distressed that “those who have gone before us have not kept the word of the LORD; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written in this book” (v. 21).

King Josiah renewed the covenant and had the people pledge themselves to it. He worked to restore the proper worship of Yahweh in the land of Judah, including celebrating the Passover to the Lord.

Proper worship is integral to following the word of the Lord. Therefore, 2 Chronicles 35 says that among the many reforms King Josiah instituted was celebration of Passover. Passover is a festival to the Lord and was to be celebrated each year. It was to remember how the Lord passed over those Israelite homes with lamb’s blood on their doorframes, sparing them from the tenth plague brought on Egypt: the death of the firstborn. However, for many years, Passover had not been observed. King Josiah led Judah in keeping the Passover as prescribed by the Lord to Moses. It was celebrated in Jerusalem on the fourteenth day of the first month, just as required by the Lord.

Josiah was concerned for right worship; and so, prior to celebrating Passover, he ensured that the priests understood their duties and were prepared. He instructed the Levites to return the ark of the covenant to its proper place

in the temple. David had prescribed specific duties to divisions of the Levites by families, and Josiah instructed that they prepare themselves accordingly. All of this was to do what the Lord had commanded through Moses.

4. *What commands did Josiah give to the priests and Levites?*

5. *Why do you think Josiah ordered the ark to be put in the temple?*

Not Since the Days of Samuel

2 Chronicles 35:16–19 KJV

16 So all the service of the LORD was prepared the same day, to keep the passover, and to offer burnt offerings upon the altar of the LORD, according to the commandment of king Josiah.

17 And the children of Israel that were present kept the passover at that time, and the feast of unleavened bread seven days.

18 And there was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

19 In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah was this passover kept.

2 Chronicles 35:16–19 NIV

¹⁶So at that time the entire service of the LORD was carried out for the celebration of the Passover and the offering of burnt offerings on the altar of the LORD, as King Josiah had ordered. ¹⁷The Israelites who were present celebrated the Passover at that time and observed the Festival of Unleavened Bread for seven days. ¹⁸The Passover had not been observed like this in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel; and none of the kings of Israel had ever celebrated such a Passover as did Josiah, with the priests, the Levites and all Judah and Israel who were there with the people of Jerusalem. ¹⁹This Passover was celebrated in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign.

As King Josiah ordered, everyone observed the requirements of Passover. Moreover, the required burnt offerings were made, and all that were present kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread. By the end of the Passover, at least 37,600 small animals were offered, plus 3,800 bulls. The people, the priests, and the Levites were all there. Even some from the northern kingdom who had not been taken into captivity joined in celebrating the Passover. Right worship was observed, not according to the designs of men, but according to what the Lord God had required. Including Rehoboam, Judah had had fifteen kings before Josiah, a period of almost three hundred years. Many of these kings did evil in the eyes of the Lord. But 2 Kings 23:25 says, "Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses."



6. Verse 16 begins, "So at that time the entire service of the LORD was carried out." What time does this refer to?

7. Why was Josiah's Passover so different from any other?

This box from the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamun was made to carry goods and could be similar to the ark of the covenant. Josiah instructed the priests and Levites to use long poles to carry the ark to its proper place in the temple (2 Chron. 35:3).

Photo: Bill Abbott

More than Liturgy

In my childhood, attending church was like breathing—something my family did without question. I believed in God, but enjoyed church as a time to play with my friends. During my teenage years, our family's church attendance reduced to a couple Sundays a month. My parents were too tired from their jobs to get us ready for church. But the ritual of going to church every Sunday had become a part of me. I would get myself up every Sunday morning and walk to the closest church.

My neighborhood church used liturgy in worship instead of spontaneous worship like our family church. But I enjoyed the Sunday school class before the worship service, so I attended the worship and repeated the liturgy like everyone else. At 15, I attended a youth camp and accepted Jesus as my Savior. The following Sunday, something was different as I read the Apostles' Creed. These words meant something to my life. I wasn't just repeating words; I was worshiping God through the liturgy.

I began to understand why we read the liturgies every Sunday. It was an acknowledgement of what God had done for us. For many Sundays afterward, tears ran down my face as I worshiped God through the words.

When I first started attending my neighborhood church, I remember thinking it was boring. I missed my family's church. Yet, once I knew Jesus personally and had the Holy Spirit living within me, I understood the "why" to repeating the liturgy every Sunday.

8. *How do you feel about the rituals or traditions of various churches?*

9. *What might church rituals mean to someone with faith in Jesus?*

10. *What is in your mind when you participate in communion, offering, altar prayer, etc.?*

Giving Thanks

Routines can become robotic. We go to church and sing the same hymns every Sunday and never stop to think what the words mean or apply them to our lives. We are admonished in God's Word that whatever we do in worshiping, we should honor Jesus and as a form of giving thanks. "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3:17).

► *We all worship God in a particular way. This week, ask yourself the question "Why?" every time you worship God in your personal time, at church, or even at work.*

KEY VERSE

Moreover Josiah kept a passover unto the LORD in Jerusalem: and they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month.

—2 Chronicles 35:1 KJV

Josiah celebrated the Passover to the LORD in Jerusalem, and the Passover lamb was slaughtered on the fourteenth day of the first month.

—2 Chronicles 35:1 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of September 23 through September 29

(See *The Quiet Hour and Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Isaiah 42:13–17—God Goes Forth like a Warrior.

Tues. James 5:7–11—Be Patient, the Lord Is Coming.

Wed. 1 Peter 3:18–22—Saved through Water.

Thu. Exodus 14:21–31—Victory at the Sea.

Fri. Psalm 104:1–9—God Protects Creation.

Sat. Psalm 147:1–12—Our Worship Gives God Joy.

Sun. Exodus 15:1–13, 20–21—Sing of God's Glorious Triumph.

Moses and Miriam Lead the People in Praise

Makena leaned into the canvas, moving her chalk-smearred fingers in smoothing movements. She was immersed in the creating, fueled by the joy of the Lord and caught up by the gospel music filling the sanctuary.

“It looks like . . . I can’t tell yet,” said Jada to Chelsea, the woman she had just met that day.

The two women were at a women’s conference with three Black churches and three white churches participating. The six St. Louis churches and their respective pastors had been gathering for the past two years. Jada suggested to the conference organizers that Makena, her friend and church member, provide a special presentation. She told them Makena was a sketch artist who sometimes used her craft in worship. They were all pleased and fascinated.

Makena took a step back and surveyed the canvas. She needed to add more blue to the sky, so she went back to work. The last few months had been hard, but the Lord had seen her through. She was also thankful for her sisters in Christ—some of them new friends—who had loved her and prayed for her.

“It’s a Black hand clasped with a white hand in prayer!” exclaimed Chelsea. “How wonderful!”

“Yes,” agreed Jada. “I like the way the hands are surrounded by the clouds and sky.”

1. *Why is it important to celebrate God’s grace, healing, and deliverance?*

2. *What kinds of circumstances might prompt us to celebrate God and His work in our lives?*

3. *How have you celebrated God in the past?*

Praising God Together

Exodus 15:1-3 KJV

1 Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

2 The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him.

3 The LORD is a man of war: the Lord is his name.

Exodus 15:1-3 NIV

¹Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:

"I will sing to the LORD,
for he is highly exalted.
Both horse and driver
he has hurled into the sea.

²"The LORD is my strength and
my defense;
he has become my salvation.
He is my God, and I will
praise him,
my father's God, and I will
exalt him

³The LORD is a warrior;
the LORD is his name."

Moses leads the Israelites in singing praises to God (v. 1). They sing with joy that God has triumphed over their enemies. This is right after the people's rescue and Pharaoh's defeat at the Red Sea. After the people walked amid the sea on dry ground (Ex. 14:22), the Lord threw the Egyptians into the sea, and they were destroyed.

Pharaoh's army was one of the greatest of that time. The people of Israel were terrified to face the Egyptian army since they were under oppressive rule for hundreds of years. Egypt was keeping them away from the worship of God in Canaan by keeping them as slaves in Egypt. In their despair, the Israelites questioned God's promises. But now they could look around at one another and sing together of His deliverance.

Once God showed up in power, all the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob came flooding back. God's victory over Egypt was proof to them that God keeps His promises. This reminder of God's character made the

people praise Him with shouts and acclamation as a warrior and Lord over the once-mighty Egypt.

4. *Why is it important to praise God together with other believers?*

5. *What can we learn about God's character from the Israelites' song of praise in Exodus 15:1–3?*

Exalting in God's Character

Exodus 15:11–13 KJV

11 Who is like unto thee,
O LORD, among the gods?
Who is like thee, glorious
in holiness, fearful in
praises, doing wonders?

12 Thou stretchedst out
thy right hand, the earth
swallowed them.

13 Thou in thy mercy
hast led forth the
people which thou hast
redeemed: thou hast
guided them in thy
strength unto thy holy
habitation.

Exodus 15:11–13 NIV

¹¹"Who among the gods
is like you, LORD?

Who is like you—
majestic in holiness,
awesome in glory,
working wonders?

¹²"You stretch out your right hand,
and the earth swallows your
enemies.

¹³In your unfailing love you will
lead
the people you have redeemed.
In your strength you will guide
them
to your holy dwelling."

Israel continues to praise the character of God. The song asks, "Who among the gods is like you?" The answer to this rhetorical question is an emphatic, "No one is like God!" No one is majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, or able to work the kinds of wonders that God works.

God's uniqueness is on full display in verse 12. His outstretched arm reveals His power over all the earth and His enemies. The picture is of a master who commands his workers. With a pointed finger, the master tells them exactly what to do, and they do it. Likewise, God's outstretched hand tells the earth exactly what to do, and the

earth does God's bidding by swallowing up His enemies. God is patient with his enemies, but when judgment comes, the earth will swallow them up.

Verse 13 is where we see God's heart of action. The reason God is acting in this way is for the sake of His people, whom He dearly loves. God has set His love on Israel and has redeemed them from Egypt. In the context of verse 13, redemption means that God has rescued and delivered His people from the bondage of slavery in Egypt.

6. *What is the significance of God's outstretched arm in verse 12?*

7. *What does redemption mean in the context of Exodus 15:13?*

Considering God's People

Exodus 15:17–18 KJV

17 Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O LORD, which thy hands have established.

18 The LORD shall reign for ever and ever.

Exodus 15:17–18 NIV

¹⁷"You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance— the place, LORD, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, Lord, your hands established.

¹⁸"The LORD reigns for ever and ever."

God's plan for Israel continues to unfold through the rest of Exodus. God's plan is revealed in the fact that His goal is to "bring them in" so that He can plant them on the "mountain of [His] inheritance," making them a nation (v. 17). The "mountain" here is likely Jerusalem, where God will make His dwelling in the "sanctuary," the future temple of Solomon.

God's reign means that He shall rule as king (v. 18). A good ruler looks after the interest of the people, which is

why a king is often compared to a shepherd who is caring for sheep. As God reigns, His people will flourish.

8. *What significance is the “mountain” in verse 17?*

9. *What does the Lord’s reign mean for God’s people?*

Leading Others to Worship God

Exodus 15:20–21 KJV

20 And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

21 And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

Exodus 15:20–21 NIV

²⁰Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron’s sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her, with timbrels and dancing.

²¹Miriam sang to them:
“Sing to the LORD,
for he is highly exalted.
Both horse and driver
he has hurled into the sea.”

Miriam continues to lead the people in a spirit of worship with tambourines and dancing. The women praise and celebrate God’s victory over their enemies.

Scripture calls Miriam a “prophetess” (v. 20 KJV), which indicates that she is communicating God’s perspective or sharing a message from God. She is one of five women labeled as “prophetess” or “woman prophet” in the Old Testament. She says, “Sing ye to the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea” (v. 21 KJV).

Miriam’s song has been with God’s people through the ages. She is an example of one who celebrated God and encouraged others to do the same.

10. *What is the significance of tambourines and dancing in verse 20?*

11. *How does Miriam’s example encourage us to celebrate our God?*

A Life of Celebration

We often gather to celebrate God. Moses led the people in praise, and they worshiped God together. By definition, celebration implies community. It's hard to celebrate by ourselves. An important part of our worship is exalting God and His character. The Israelites celebrated God by singing about His characteristics. Our God is majestic, is holy, and works wonders. A "wonder" is something beautiful or unexpected—perhaps unexpectedly beautiful. It's so amazing it takes us by surprise and may inspire awe and admiration. This is our response to God's glorious works. Any aspect of creation, any gift we acknowledge from His hand, any miracle recorded in Scripture leads us to acknowledge almighty God in worship.

The Israelites' song mentioned general and specific wonders. When God stretches His hand over creation, it obeys His command. God rescued Israel from slavery. How much more has He rescued us when we accept Him as Lord and Savior and redeemed us from slavery to sin!

Israel responded to God's lovingkindness with praise and worship, and we are encouraged to do the same. As long as God reigns, He will establish His people and keep His promises of inheritance. And God will reign forever.

Moses' sister, Miriam, encouraged the women to follow her in celebration with music and dance. We worship Him in grateful response to the covenant relationship He has initiated with us, and we praise Him for His goodness and mercy in offering us eternal redemption.

12. *What are some important aspects of our celebration of God?*

13. *What does it mean to say that God works wonders?*

14. *What unique characteristics of God's character might we exalt in our worship?*

15. *How do these verses encourage us to celebrate God?*

It's Time to Celebrate!

Moses and Miriam's songs of praise to the Lord provide examples of how to celebrate God. We celebrate God by giving Him honor, praise, and worship.

► *Write a song or prayer of worship and celebration to God. Then consider how you might share this with others to encourage them to celebrate God along with you.*

KEY VERSE

And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. —Exodus 15:20 KJV

Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her, with timbrels and dancing. —Exodus 15:20 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of September 30 through October 6

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** Hebrews 10:26–35—Do Not Persist in Sin.
- Tues.** 2 Corinthians 7:5–11—Godly Grief Leads to Repentance.
- Wed.** Proverbs 28:4–18—The Righteous and the Wicked.
- Thu.** 2 Samuel 11:1–5, 14–24—Sin's Deadly Spiral.
- Fri.** Lamentations 5:1–3, 15–22—God, Restore Us.
- Sat.** John 21:15–19—Follow Christ.
- Sun.** Psalm 51:1–13, 16–17—Create in Me a Clean Heart.

Prayers of Repentance and Confession

Mia ended the call on her cell with an eye roll. Her friend Dionne was in a tired and irritable mood, and the mood had come through loud and clear.

Dionne had invited Mia to a women's conference and "tea" luncheon that was the next day. Women were encouraged to wear their best hat, and Mia didn't own one. She didn't think she looked good in hats, but she had spent an afternoon shopping for one anyway. She found a black fascinator hat with flowers and feathers on top and mesh around the front and thought it made her look pretty good.

While Mia used her GPS, the church's street name was throwing her off, so she had called Dionne to ask about it. What she got was the attitude of, "I don't feel like talking to you right now, because I'm tired." Dionne had just arrived home from work and said it had been a grueling work week. Still, she had been rude, and Mia was using it for ammunition not to go to the conference.

However, she listened to a broadcast sermon later that evening that changed her mind. Mia realized that she was being moody and needed to support her friend.

During her morning devotion time, Mia repented. In her prayer, she asked God to give her a right spirit, heart, and attitude.

Four hours later, she was in her SUV with her hat on and GPS set to the church's address.

- 1.** *Why do we need God's cleansing?*
- 2.** *What does it mean to hate our own sin?*
- 3.** *Why can we not repent for anyone else?*

David Pleads for Forgiveness

Psalm 51:1–4 KJV

1 Have mercy upon me,
O God, according to thy
lovingkindness: according
unto the multitude of thy
tender mercies blot out my
transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from
mine iniquity, and cleanse
me from my sin.

3 For I acknowledge my
transgressions: and my sin is
ever before me.

4 Against thee, thee only,
have I sinned, and done this
evil in thy sight: that thou
mightest be justified when
thou speakest, and be clear
when thou judgest.

Psalm 51:1–4 NIV

¹Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing
love;
according to your great
compassion

blot out my transgressions.

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

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

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

The superscription of this psalm identifies it as being written after David's adultery with Bathsheba and his sending her husband, Uriah, to certain death. When confronted by the prophet Nathan (2 Sam. 12:1–12), David saw that he had offended God with his many sins.

From the beginning of this psalm, David was a broken man. He opened his confession to God bluntly, without any attempt to justify himself. Instead, he acknowledged his dire need for God's mercy and forgiveness. He would not be restored because of anything he had done to "make up" for his sin, but because of God's character. He threw himself on God's mercy, hoping that he would be restored "according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion" (v. 1). Only God was capable and willing to "blot out [David's] transgressions" and forgive him fully.

David followed his confession with a direct request:

“Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin” (v. 2). Again, David understood that only God could completely restore him, cleanse him, and remove his sin entirely. He acknowledged and grieved over his sin, and over its effects upon him personally: “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me” (v. 3). In addition to fully recognizing his great offense before God, David’s sin and guilt had become an unbearable weight as well. David had been at least somewhat aware of the extent of his sin and had tried to push it down and ignore it, yet it had “always [been] before [him].” Now, after Nathan’s confrontation, there was nowhere left to hide.

Thus, David now expressed the full extent of his affront to God: “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (v. 4). Now obviously, David had also sinned against Uriah—Bathsheba’s husband—by conspiring to kill him (2 Sam. 11:15). But ultimately, David’s offense was first and foremost against the God who had given life to both him and to Uriah. God had seen it all and had now called David to account. Therefore, David had no defense; he would accept whatever God decided to do with him:

“You are right in your verdict and justified when you judge” (v. 4).

4. *What was David’s state of mind as he wrote Psalm 51?*

5. *What did David ask of God in verse 2? Why?*

6. *Against whom did David sin? How did this affect his plea before God?*

The Joy of Salvation

Psalm 51:10–12, 15–17 KJV
 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

Psalm 51:10–12, 15–17 NIV
¹⁰Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

11 Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.

12 Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.

15 O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.

16 For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

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

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

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

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

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

In verse 10, David's focus shifted from repentance and forgiveness to restoration—of both his heart and his standing before God. Only God could forgive David's sin and guilt, and David had fully acknowledged this truth. Now, he also acknowledged that only God could "renew" him—give him a brand-new heart and a brand-new spirit (Ezek. 36:26). He pleaded, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (v. 10). Only then would he be able to again live in a way that pleased God, and be able to keep steadfastly living it. And again, David acknowledged that the decision to grant this new heart and spirit was all up to God: "Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me" (v. 11).

Nonetheless, David banked on God's mercy. He expressed the hope of his heart and how he would respond to that mercy: "Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me"

(v. 12). David trusted that God, in His goodness, would not only restore him but sustain him, keep him from falling back into sin, and even once again use him to “teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you” (v. 13). He awaited the day when his confidence in God would be completed in him; on that day, God would also “Open my lips . . . [that] my mouth will declare your praise” (v. 15). Freedom from sin would also give David the freedom to once more worship God without restraint as he had done in the past.

Again, David acknowledged that there was no act of penitence or sacrifice that would bring about God’s forgiveness: “You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings” (v. 16). Verses 16 and 17 may sound as though David had rejected the sacrificial system. But that cannot be, since God had ordained that form of worship. Instead, David expressed his understanding that sacrifices are useless—and even offensive to God—if unaccompanied by repentance.

There was one thing, however, that he could offer to God: “My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit.” He placed his confidence that this sacrifice would be enough, and that God would honor it: “a broken and contrite heart, you, God, will not despise” (v. 17). A broken heart was an open heart—and thus one God could use.

While David suffered many consequences for his sins with Bathsheba, God still used him as king and allowed David’s second child with Bathsheba, Solomon, to build the greatest temple and kingdom ancient Israel would ever see.

7. *How did the focus of David’s prayer shift in verse 10?*

8. *What did David hope God would give him? How did David say he would respond?*

9. *What sacrifice did David believe God would accept?*

A Clean Heart

This week's Scripture is not only about David and his sin, or us and our temptations, choices, and actions. The real hero in this story is God. Hundreds of years before Jesus came to earth, the prophet Ezekiel recorded God's encouragement for His people: "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (Ezek. 36:25-27).

In Psalm 51, David described how he experienced each part of God's interactive promise. He asked God to wash him and cleanse him from his sin (v. 2). In faith, David asked God for a clean heart and a renewed spirit (v. 10). He gave God his contrite and broken heart and spirit (v. 17) in exchange for restored joy in and praise for God's salvation (vv. 12, 15). David knew his only hope of living a life that pleased God was to receive cleansing forgiveness and a new heart to follow God and walk in His ways.

We can take the same steps David did to experience forgiveness and God's mercy and faithfulness to sustain us in our willingness to walk in God's presence. The book of Hebrews quotes God's promise in Jeremiah 31:34, "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more," then adds, "And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary" (Heb. 10:17-18).

10. *What are some "ordinary" sins that could be just as dangerous?*

11. *How does our sin affect us?*

12. *Why is it important to consider the consequences of our choices and actions?*

13. *What does God require of us to receive forgiveness and cleansing that heals our heart and spirit?*

Ask God for a Clean Heart

David's powerful prayer guides us through acknowledging and facing our sin and need for God's mercy and forgiveness. His words help us assume a posture of dependence, hope, and praise for God's faithfulness and lovingkindness as we bring our own sacrifice of a broken spirit and contrite heart.

► *Write a prayer of commitment or recommitment or personal journal response as God's Spirit leads you to turn away from sin and toward Him for cleansing and renewal. Think about these questions as you write, "What does it mean to come before God with a sacrifice of a broken spirit? In what areas has God shown you the need for a broken and repentant heart? How does a heartfelt prayer of repentance lead to joy?"*

KEY VERSE

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. —Psalm 51:10 KJV

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. —Psalm 51:10 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of October 7 through October 13

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Luke 13:10–17—Set Free from Bondage.
- Tue.** Daniel 3:8–18—Our God Is Able to Deliver.
- Wed.** Daniel 3:19–27—Our God Is Unstoppable.
- Thu.** Matthew 8:5–17—A Cry for Help in Distress.
- Fri.** Mark 10:46–52—Have Mercy on Me!
- Sat.** Psalm 107:23–32—God Delivers Us from Our Distress.
- Sun.** Psalm 22:1–11, 19–22—Deliver My Soul, O God.

A Plea for Deliverance

Titus looked from the clock to the motionless body of his roommate. It was 6:45 a.m., and Curtis hadn't budged. Breakfast was from 7:00–8:30 a.m. in the dining hall.

No nurse's aide had come to their room yet this morning. Titus ranked this group from fair to average. In the world of nursing home healthcare workers, turnover was high, and Titus was praying for a better batch eventually.

Titus also ranked the nursing home, where he had been for the past five months, from fair to average. With family obligations, money limitations, and the deaths of his only child, Simone, and Claudine, his sister, Titus had ended up at the Westgate Rehabilitation and Nursing Care Facility. He didn't like it.

Titus had virtually no visitors. The nursing home minister, who held Bible study for the residents once a week, sometimes visited him. But his pastor and members of his church had yet to come. Titus had been a faithful member, youth ministry worker, devoted father, and friend. And this was his reward?

"Lord, is this what You have for me? Will You not provide a way for me to leave here? Or will You not bring good people around me? It just all seems so bleak." Titus half prayed and half cried. "I know You didn't throw me away. But I do feel that way sometimes. Please, God, do something."

1. *Why is it natural for Christians to experience periods in their lives when their walk with the Lord feels tiresome and burdensome?*

2. *Briefly describe the circumstances of a time when you felt most distant from God.*

3. *How do you recover your spiritual vitality when your soul seems far away from the Lord?*

A Cry to the God Who Saves

Psalm 22:1–5 KJV

1 My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?

2 O my God, I cry in the day time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.

3 But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.

4 Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them.

5 They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.

Psalm 22:1–5 NIV

¹My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?

²My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.

³Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel praises.

⁴In you our ancestors put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.

⁵To you they cried out and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

David wrote Psalm 22 during a time in his life of crisis and persecution. He needed God's help and intervention, and he called on God to act on his behalf. The early church saw in this psalm not only a reference to David's experience but also a prophetic summary of what would happen to Jesus, the ultimate king. No known episode in David's life can account, in a literal sense, for many of the expressions in this psalm. Yet those expressions fit the suffering of David's descendant, Jesus, in a precise way. It is no wonder that this "psalm of the cross" is quoted in the New Testament more than any other psalm.

Even as he began his psalm, David held none of his pain back: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?" (v. 1). The God who had anointed David His future king four years earlier (1 Sam. 16:1–13) now seemed

nowhere to be found. In his exhaustion and confusion after years of running from the current king, Saul, David lamented the distance he felt from his God and struggled to find a way to experience His presence once more. And yet, he felt his cries were falling on deaf ears: “I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest” (v. 2). Both peace and sleep eluded David as he waited for God to respond.

Then, David “checked himself.” He recalled that the God he cried out to was indeed there, and David recognized Him for who He was, so David declared, “Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises” (Ps. 22:3). No matter what David’s current personal condition was, God remained on His throne. He is holy and blameless; He remained worthy of all praise. This knowledge enabled David to push through his own personal anguish and focus instead on the almighty God. David had cried out to God, but would not be so presumptuous as to accuse Him of wrongdoing. Instead, he would worship Him—and continue to wait for deliverance.

David then recalled God’s previous blessings to His people Israel: “In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them” (v. 4). The God who had delivered His people after 40 years in the wilderness during the time of Moses (Deut. 2:7) could certainly deliver David from his own current “wilderness experience,” as Saul and his men had literally chased him through the desert for years. So David could say, “To you [the Israelites] cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame” (v. 5).

4. *What was David feeling as he began Psalm 22?*

5. *How, and why, did David’s perspective change in verse 3?*

6. *What did David recall (vv. 4–5)? How did this help him?*

God Our Only Help

Psalm 22:6–11 KJV

6 But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.

7 All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying,

8 He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.

9 But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts.

10 I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly.

11 Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help.

Psalm 22:6–11 NIV

⁶But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by everyone,
despised by the people.

⁷All who see me mock me;
they hurl insults, shaking
their heads.

⁸"He trusts in the LORD," they
say,

"let the LORD rescue him.
Let him deliver him,
since he delights in him."

⁹Yet you brought me out of the
womb;
you made me trust in you,
even at my mother's breast.

¹⁰From birth I was cast on you;
from my mother's womb you
have been my God.

¹¹Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.

David next spoke of his own condition, before both God and men: "I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people" (v. 6). Only the all-powerful God, whom David was as nothing ("a worm") compared to, could see his plight and restore him. Though this declaration has been misapplied by believers throughout the years, it was still an accurate reflection of David's standing. David also captured the sneers of those who despised him in verses 7–8: "All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. He trusts in the LORD . . . let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him." Such insults have always

followed those who follow God—and would be echoed as Jesus hung on the cross (Matt. 27:43).

David again turned from his own pain and toward the God who could deliver him. His words in verses 9–10 echoed those of Psalm 139:13–16: God had known David from the womb; He had shaped and formed David; he was “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14). And since that time, “you made me trust in you, even at my mother’s breast . . . from my mother’s womb you have been my God” (Ps. 22:9–10). David owed his very life to God, from birth to the present. God had also called him to become king; and so, despite the ongoing pursuit from the current king, David prayed that God would continue to preserve his life. David had honored God, and now prayed that God would restore his honor.

Despite the distance he felt from God in his current distress, David continued to place his hope in and petition God for deliverance: “Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help” (v. 11). “Trouble” had dogged David’s steps for four years now. If God would not help David, no one else would, or could. Thus, David chose to place his trust in the God who could rescue him—and had, even up to this point.



Gustave Dore's 19th-century engraving of the crucifixion. David's description in Psalm 22 fits remarkably with what happened to Jesus.

Public Domain

7. How did David describe his current condition and his circumstances?

8. How did David's perspective change yet again, in verses 9–10?

9. What did David ask of God?

Dark Night of the Soul

Juan de Yepes y Alvarez (1542–1591), better known as John of the Cross, wrote the classic, *Dark Night of the Soul*, which relates how believers in Christ still must experience times when their souls feel as though the Lord has woe-fully abandoned them. How God delivers them from such spiritual turmoil has comforted and inspired countless Christians from the sixteenth century to today.

It should encourage us to know that even the greatest saints have endured these dark nights of the soul. The apostles each had to confront their own lack of faith when Jesus was arrested and crucified. Furthermore, Paul, who became a devoted follower of the Lord, had to face moments when his weaknesses seemed to separate him from Christ (2 Cor. 12:7–10).

The most startling example of feeling abandoned by God was when Jesus cried out from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). Even God’s Son, who had never sinned, felt far away from His Father as dark clouds covered the sky above Him. And yet, at the moment of His death, Jesus surrendered His soul into God’s embrace.

How can we not do what Jesus did—cry out to God and offer our souls to Him in our darkest moments? For those of us who are faithful, our story does not end with our loud lament and our passionate outcry. The Lord promises a fulfillment of our hope in that heavenly place where the Lord “will wipe every tear from [our] eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain” (Rev. 21:4)

10. *How would you describe your “dark night of the soul”?*

11. *What did those periods in your life teach you about God?*

12. *What insights from such experiences would you share with other believers?*

A Prayer Letter

When David wrote Psalm 22, he was in deep anguish. Later, Jesus echoed his words while He was dying on the cross. Both cried out to God, both felt abandoned by God—and both were raised out of their distress. Their experiences tell us that even though we might feel alone in our affliction, we really aren't. Although we don't see Him, or we might think He's not listening to our prayers, He really is with us and will respond to our pleas.

► *Take a few minutes to write a prayer letter to Christ Jesus, which may be for yourself or a loved one. Relate how much you need His sovereign and distinctive aid although you feel He is not listening to your cry for help. Nevertheless, you will trust in Him because you still have faith in His goodness and mercy.*

KEY VERSE

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?

—Psalm 22:1 KJV

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?

—Psalm 22:1 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of October 14 through October 20

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** Ephesians 1:3–14—Redemption through Christ's Blood.
- Tue.** 1 Peter 1:3–12—Praise God for New Birth.
- Wed.** Daniel 6:10–17—May Your God Deliver You.
- Thu.** Daniel 6:18–28—God Shut the Lions' Mouths.
- Fri.** Judges 5:1–5, 12–22—Deborah's Song of Deliverance.
- Sat.** Luke 17:11–18—Praising God with a Loud Voice.
- Sun.** Isaiah 25:1–10a—God's Victory Feast.

Praise for Deliverance

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren and 'sistren' to dwell together in unity," bellowed Pastor Reynolds.

He was a tall, large man who seemed to possess a spirit just as great. It was a Sunday afternoon, and Word Church Ministries was celebrating paying off their mortgage. The church's instructions were to invite their Christian and non-Christian friends alike from "all walks of life" out to the mortgage burning service.

Since the church was in a college town, many of the visitors were from the university.

"This is a sample of what heaven will look like," said Pastor Reynolds. "People from every kindred and tongue will be there together. So, we may as well get used to eternity now.

"God is going to prepare a magnificent feast, and everyone is invited," the minister continued. "There will be no hatred and discrimination there. The only thing required is that you must have accepted the precious gift of His Son. You must have received the one and only thing that will allow you to enter the Father's presence. You must confess Jesus as Lord and accept His death on Calvary.

"Then, you can join all peoples in that great banquet!" concluded Pastor Reynolds. "Won't that be a glorious time? Then somebody needs to shout 'Amen!'"

"Amen!" rang out voices from the congregation.

- 1.** *What are your special memories of eating with others?*
- 2.** *Why can there be something uniquely wonderful about sharing a meal?*
- 3.** *How did Jesus make eating with others especially significant and intimate?*

Perfect Faithfulness

Isaiah 25:1–5 KJV

1 O Lord, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.

2 For thou hast made of a city an heap; of a defenced city a ruin: a palace of strangers to be no city; it shall never be built.

3 Therefore shall the strong people glorify thee, the city of the terrible nations shall fear thee.

4 For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.

5 Thou shalt bring down the noise of strangers, as the heat in a dry place; even the heat with the shadow of a cloud: the branch of the terrible ones shall be brought low.

Isaiah 25:1–5 NIV

¹LORD, you are my God;
I will exalt you and praise your name,
for in perfect faithfulness
you have done wonderful things,
things planned long ago.
²You have made the city a heap of rubble,
the fortified town a ruin,
the foreigners' stronghold a city no more;
it will never be rebuilt.
³Therefore strong peoples will honor you;
cities of ruthless nations will revere you.
⁴You have been a refuge for the poor,
a refuge for the needy in their distress,
a shelter from the storm
and a shade from the heat.
For the breath of the ruthless
is like a storm driving against a wall
⁵ and like the heat of the desert.
You silence the uproar of foreigners;
as heat is reduced by the shadow of a cloud,
so the song of the ruthless is stilled.

Prophets were God’s messengers who gave God’s perspective on events. In the eighth-century BC, Isaiah saw the growing threat of the mighty kingdom of Assyria. He knew that only faith in Yahweh’s plan would save Judah, not some clever political maneuvering.

In chapters 23–27, Isaiah addresses the whole world. He says that God has pronounced judgment on a “city” (Isa. 24:1–13, 17–23; 25:2). The city could be the capital of Assyria, or it could represent any city of oppressive rulers. In response to God’s intervention in history, other nations will honor God as a strong deliverer (v. 3).

Yahweh shows compassion toward the weak (vv. 4–5). The “poor” and “needy” find security from God, who is like a house in the middle of a storm or cloud in the heat of the day. The “storm” and the “heat” represent malevolent intentions of greedy kings. God is able to reduce them all to silence (v. 5).

Isaiah’s imagery also recalls the Israelites’ time of following God in the wilderness. God led them through the desert in the form of a cloud (Ex. 13:21–22). Just as God had gone before them and protected them in the past, God was still concerned for His people and would not let them be destroyed.

4. *Why has God pronounced judgment on a “city” (v. 2)?*

5. *What images of God’s protection does Isaiah share?*

Tears Wiped Away

Isaiah 25:6–8 KJV

6 And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.

Isaiah 25:6–8 NIV

⁶ On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines.
⁷ On this mountain he will destroy

7 And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations.

8 He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it.

the shroud that enfolds all peoples,
the sheet that covers all nations;
8 he will swallow up death forever.

The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces;
he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth.

The LORD has spoken.

Isaiah continues to describe how God intervenes in history. He can crush the city that spreads chaos across the land, for He is “LORD of hosts” (v. 6 KJV). He commands armies of heavenly angels that outnumber human armies—like the ones that threaten Judah.

God will “make” or “prepare” something new: a feast for all nations (v. 6). Isaiah portrays a coming banquet, with Yahweh as its host. A feast will be held atop Mount Zion, and God will serve choice meat and fine wine. Meat was not a regular part of an ancient diet; still God is preparing to serve His guests lavish portions of the best foods. This is divine abundance, a way of saying that even some of Judah’s enemies will turn to find favor from God.

God’s ultimate enemy is death. Yahweh will put an end to this “vail” or “shroud,” which all people fear (v. 7). Instead of allowing death to “swallow” humans any longer, God will be the one to “swallow up death in victory” (v. 8 KJV). His victory means an end to tears from “all faces,” for God is going to protect the honor and reputation of His people (v. 8). Judah is not about to be destroyed and disappear from the earth, for Yahweh is able to save, even from death.

6. *What is God preparing for people of all nations (v. 6)?*

7. *What figurative enemy is God planning to defeat (v. 8)?*

Trusting God

Isaiah 25:9–10a KJV

9 And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

10 For in this mountain shall the hand of the LORD rest.

Isaiah 25:9–10a NIV

⁹In that day they will say, “Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us.

This is the LORD, we trusted in him;

let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.”

¹⁰The hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain.

Isaiah predicts deliverance of God’s people—a relevant message for those facing armies bent on destruction. God preserved Judah from Assyria and kept a remnant of His people in Jerusalem, as Isaiah said He would (Isa. 10:20–23).

Isaiah also says that God’s plan is bigger: God is planning to destroy death itself (Isa. 25:8). Since God’s victory is more glorious than anything in human experience, even God’s people will be amazed at the salvation of God. The people shall say to themselves, “This is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us” (v. 9 KJV). Isaiah predicts God’s salvation will come to the mountain of God. The same images of a *mountain* and *city* are repeated in the vision of Revelation 21:10. There, from a mountaintop, John witnessed the city of the new Jerusalem descending from heaven. God will dwell with His people forever. The Lord Jesus is the God who saves, the God who defeats death, and the God who invites all nations to turn to Him in faith. They become the guests of His table.

8. *What did Isaiah’s prediction of salvation mean for Judah?*

9. *How does Jesus fulfill Isaiah’s words about the God who saves?*

God's Great Banquet

One day during the ministry of Jesus, He was sharing a meal in the home of a Pharisee (Luke 14:1–24). Everyone was vying for attention and seeking a place of honor at the meal. But as was Jesus' habit, He told a story. His parable told of a man preparing a magnificent banquet. This man invited many guests, but they declined the invitation and gave excuses. When the man learned of this, he told his servant to invite the poor, the disabled, and the people from roads and country lanes so that his house could be full (Luke 14:23). The banquet goes on, and what a shame for those who miss it!

Jesus' listeners understood that He was talking about God and His heavenly kingdom. The followers of Jesus would spread the good news of salvation for all people. But God's kingdom is especially good news for the poor and lowly and those who appear forgotten. If we wish to be near the kingdom of God, we follow Jesus into places of poverty and need.

Ask yourself: Am I one of those who would decline the invitation? Do I make excuses about the business of my life? If we wish to experience the full measure of God's abundance, His banquet, we must set aside our excuses and join the fellowship of those who accept His invitation—including some we once considered enemies.

The banquet of God is a picture of the end of time, a celebration like no other. God's love, mercy, and salvation shall be on everyone's lips. "People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God" (Luke 13:29).

10. *What barriers do you encounter when God calls you to share the good news about Jesus?*

11. *Which people does society appear to forget?*

12. *How can you receive courage and determination to invite people to God's great banquet?*

The Great Commission

In this week's Scripture, Isaiah declared God's awesome invitation to partake in a great banquet, which He has been preparing for "all" peoples—that is, for people from all over the world who will humbly receive Him as their Lord God. Moreover, for those who already are His people, God calls them—and us—to invite everyone we know and meet to join in this festive occasion.

► *First write, "Invite all peoples to the feast of the Lord" at the top of an index card. Below it, write some names of people you could share the gospel with this week and so invite them to the wedding feast of the Lamb.*

KEY VERSE

And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. —Isaiah 25:6 KJV

On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. —Isaiah 25:6 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of October 21 through October 27

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Mark 9:14–27—I Believe, Help My Unbelief!
- Tue.** Psalm 28—God Is My Strength and Shield.
- Wed.** Proverbs 3:1–8, 13–14—Trust God with All Your Heart.
- Thu.** 1 John 4:4–13—God in You Is Greater.
- Fri.** 1 John 4:14–21—Boldness on the Day of Judgment.
- Sat.** Jeremiah 17:5–11—Blessed Are Those Who Trust God.
- Sun.** Psalm 62—Wait upon God's Salvation.

Trust in God Alone

Well, you seem to be pretty calm for someone who doesn't have a job," said Tiana's cousin, Shayla.

After three years, Tiana had lost her job as a software engineer. Finding another one—even with her degree, expertise, and experience—was proving to be challenging.

"Did you call my friend who's in human resources at that company?" asked Shayla.

"I did," responded Tiana, "and he said there is nothing available right now."

"You're just going to have to move from this area, or at least out of this small town," said Shayla. "You'll do better on the West Coast."

Tiana liked the Midwest, and she didn't want to move. She would, however, if directed by the Lord. But she wasn't sensing anything like that. While Tiana wasn't distraught about her situation, she was concerned and had been talking to the Lord about it. The single mother needed a steady job. Her emergency funds wouldn't last forever. She had been doing some freelance work for a few business owners and small start-up companies. But she wanted and needed a job with benefits, especially medical coverage.

So Tiana had been researching options and searching for employment. And she trusted God. Tiana had walked with the Lord long enough to know that He always had her back, front, and sides! Her hope was squarely in the Lord, which allowed her to have peace.

1. *Why is rest important to you?*
2. *Why does God provide the only true rest for you?*
3. *Different from finding rest in the Lord, how is He a fortress for you?*

Rest in God

Psalm 62:1–2 KJV

To the chief Musician,
to Jeduthun, A Psalm of
David.

1 Truly my soul waiteth
upon God: from him cometh
my salvation.

2 He only is my rock and
my salvation; he is my
defence; I shall not be great-
ly moved.

Psalm 62:1–2 NIV

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

¹Truly my soul finds rest in
God;

my salvation comes from
him.

²Truly he is my rock and my
salvation;

he is my fortress, I will never
be shaken.

The depth of trust David describes is borne out of experience. He may not have had this confidence when he was fleeing from Saul and pleading with God for deliverance. David was no longer the shepherd boy who defeated Goliath. He was anointed for the throne; he escaped from Saul; he became king; and he experienced myriad trials. In this psalm, he finds rest and peace in the presence of God.

As a military man, David would have understood the power of an impregnable fortress. Inside its walls, there would be protection against enemies bent on his destruction. Seeing God as a fortress increased David's confidence that, no matter what he faced as king, the Lord would never abandon him and would always protect him.

Ancient fortresses were often built on bedrock so that their walls would hold steady under attack and bombardment. Standing on top of those walls, the king might feel them shake; but he knew that they would never fall, all because of their foundation. David uses this metaphor of a rock to describe his unshakable belief that God would preserve his soul through the attacks of the enemy.

4. *How does David describe God?*

5. *Why is the psalmist able to find spiritual rest in the Lord?*

My Rock and Salvation

Psalm 62:5–8 KJV

5 My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him.

6 He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defence; I shall not be moved.

7 In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God.

8 Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us. Selah

Psalm 62:5–8 NIV

⁵Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him.

⁶Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.

⁷My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge.

⁸Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.

Knowing that his soul was secure in God's hands, David could put hope in the Lord, not only for his ultimate salvation, but the daily confidence he would need to keep moving forward.

David saw that everything important to him found its origin in God. If David had any honor, it was bestowed on him by God. This is the essence of humility: that our skills, our abilities, and the life we build find their origin in God. A truly humble person concedes that he or she would be nothing apart from God. The only reason we are breathing is because God is thinking about us. We are dependent on Him, no matter what we have accomplished.

In this state of humility, David sees the Lord as a place of refuge. Like bedrock, God is immovable in His steadfastness. The Father is a refuge from all of this, a place of escape where we can regroup, and get a better grasp of how the Holy Spirit wants to lead us through our trials.

Knowing the peace of trusting in God, David wants his people to experience this for themselves. The king knew that the people were looking to him for spiritual

leadership. They understood that if he could trust God under unbelievable pressure, then they could find their rest in Him too.

According to their king, the way to experience this was to pour out their hearts to God, confident that He would hear their cries. This is the very state in which God receives our prayers. As we pour out our hearts, and our stories, to Him, we begin to see how God is at work in our lives. As we do this, our sense of God as a place of safety and refuge only increases.

6. *What metaphors does David use to describe God?*

7. *What command does the psalmist give to his readers?*

Weighed in the Balance

Psalm 62:9–12 KJV

9 Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity.

10 Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them.

11 God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God.

12 Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work.

Psalm 62:9–12 NIV

⁹Surely the lowborn are but a breath,
the highborn are but a lie.
If weighed on a balance, they are nothing;
together they are only a breath.

¹⁰Do not trust in extortion
or put vain hope in stolen goods;
though your riches increase,
do not set your heart on them.

¹¹One thing God has spoken,
two things I have heard:

“Power belongs to you, God,

¹²and with you, Lord, is

unfailing love”;

and, “You reward everyone according to what they have done.”

Everyone is held accountable by God. Some people may not realize this until they are on their deathbeds, where they finally comprehend that all the money, power, and positions in the world cannot stop their inevitable demise. In those hours, they realize that everyone is equal in the eyes of God—and equally helpless to do anything about their mortal condition without divine intervention.

David even addresses his skeptical readers who are immoral and ruthless. David, with untold wealth at his disposal, realized that all this coin would not prevent or delay (in any way) his accountability before God. While it's tempting to put one's hope in riches, David warns the wealthy not to do this. In your final hours, all the money in the world will mean nothing.

David concludes these thoughts by admitting to God that all power and love belong to Him. Without love, power only becomes a way to perpetuate a meaningless existence. When we are in a right relationship with God, life becomes full of meaning, significance, and purpose. Whatever power and resources God gives His people can be used to advance His kingdom and build one another up in the faith.

David's final sentence reminds us of the end of all people. Everyone will stand before God and give an account for their lives and the decisions they made that got them to the point where they are now. So many nonbiblical worldviews are built on a false assumption that no one will be held accountable by God, or that forgiveness of sin is not necessary. But this is false. Still, God's judgment does not need to be a source of fear and dread for those who have acknowledged their sin before God and trust Jesus to save them. God will pronounce them as righteous because of what Christ has done.

8. *David says it is futile to place one's trust in what?*

9. *On what basis are people rewarded?*

Rock and Fortress

In the hymn “Rock of Ages,” Augustus Toplady wrote the words “let me hide myself in thee.” He goes on to say that because the Lord alone can save him, he clings to the cross and looks to Him for grace before the judgment throne. Jesus is the “Rock of Ages,” and in Him does the lyricist find rest for his soul.

In the Christian anthem “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” Martin Luther notes that God is “a bulwark never failing.” Although the prince of darkness is grim and ever threatening, his cruel hate cannot prevail against Christ Jesus, for the truth of God is everlasting and His kingdom is forever. Therefore, the lyricist proclaims a triumphant Lord Jesus!

Both the imagery of a rock and a fortress portray the sure security that comes when believers abide in Christ Jesus. Physically and emotionally, we may suffer many blows; but our souls are safe when our faith in the Lord remains firm. Christ as our rock and fortress assures us that He will stand with us no matter what hardship we endure and no matter what menace we encounter.

As symbols of what the Lord Jesus means to us, a rock and a fortress can imply two different aspects of how He cares for us. As a rock, Christ is a haven for our weary souls. As a fortress, Christ provides an unassailable citadel for our protection. Both are vital for the health of our souls, and both are promised to all of God’s children.

Christ is not one at one time and the other at another time; He is both at the same time. As a rock and a fortress, Jesus is our salvation to whom we humbly declare His everlasting glory: “For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen” (Rom. 11:36).

- 10.** *How can God be both a rock and fortress?*
- 11.** *What are the similarities and differences?*
- 12.** *When has He been both of those in your life?*

Rest and Hope for Your Soul

David's life was threatened on many occasions, and he always found refuge in God. Moreover, he paid tribute to God for His faithfulness to him through the many psalms he sang and dedicated to the Lord. These psalms have been an inspiration and comfort to God's children throughout the centuries. Psalm 62 is cherished among them, for it perfectly verbalizes our heartfelt gratitude to our heavenly Father.

► *During the coming week, memorize the Key Verse (Ps. 62:5) and recite it in a daily morning prayer. In your daily evening prayer, relate to the Lord how incidents during the day indicate to you how He as a rock and a fortress gives rest and provides hope for your soul.*

KEY VERSE

My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him. —Psalm 62:5 KJV

Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him. —Psalm 62:5 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of October 28 through November 3

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Ezekiel 34:1–6—Sheep without a Shepherd.
- Tue.** Ezekiel 34:7–16—God Opposes Unfit Leaders.
- Wed.** Ezekiel 34:17–31—God Will Appoint a Shepherd.
- Thu.** John 10:1–10—The Good Shepherd Defends the Flock.
- Fri.** John 10:11–18—The Good Shepherd Gives His Life.
- Sat.** Revelation 7:1–4, 9–17—The Lamb Will Be Their Shepherd.
- Sun.** Psalm 23—The Lord Is My Shepherd.

Confidence in God's Shepherding

Minnie leaned in and blew out the eight and zero candles. Applause filled the room. She smiled as she looked around at family, friends, and neighbors who had come to the civic center for her birthday celebration.

Minnie thought she was coming to the civic center on this Saturday afternoon for a water aerobics class. Her youngest daughter, Courtney, had picked her up. Minnie still loved the water. It was what kept her in shape.

When Minnie was directed to one of the large meeting rooms, she was met with a chorus of "Surprise!"

"Speech! Speech!"

"I'm grateful to have so many people I love under one roof," said Minnie. "God is good all the time, and all the time . . ."

"God is good!" said the crowd in unison.

"God has been good to me all the days of my life," Minnie continued. "He has been my constant, my portion, my helper, my keeper. His goodness, mercy, and love have followed me. I don't know how much longer I have to be here, but God's love will be with me until the end, and then forever in heaven."

"We hope to have you here for at least another 20 years!" her son, Cameron, said in his baritone voice.

1. *In your childhood, did one or both of your parents cause you to feel protected and safe? What did they do to provide you with that environment?*

2. *Think of a frightening circumstance you have experienced. How did it affect you?*

3. *Do you trust that God will protect you when you face difficulties? Do you seek God when trouble arises, or do you tend to rely on yourself for solutions?*

The Shepherd Provides

Psalm 23:1–4 KJV

A Psalm of David.

1 The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.

2 He maketh me to lie
down in green pastures: he
leadeth me beside the still
waters.

3 He restoreth my soul: he
leadeth me in the paths of
righteousness for his name's
sake.

4 Yea, though I walk
through the valley of the
shadow of death, I will fear
no evil: for thou art with
me; thy rod and thy staff
they comfort me.

Psalm 23:1–4 NIV

A psalm of David.

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I
lack nothing.

²He makes me lie down in
green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet
waters,

³he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right
paths
for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

The psalmist begins with a simple identification: His shepherd (using a singular possessive) is “the LORD” (v. 1). David was himself a shepherd; he views Yahweh as his own shepherd, who provides for every need.

The statement “The LORD is my shepherd” contains the name of God, Yahweh. It is the same name that God revealed to Moses on Mount Horeb (Ex. 3:1). The name Yahweh is related to the Hebrew verb “to be,” and it expresses God’s unequalled and unparalleled nature. Moses was sent before Pharaoh to display God’s power and His name’s honor, since God intervened to rescue the Hebrews from slavery (Ex. 9:16). The same idea is in Psalm 23, when God’s actions are attributed to “his name’s sake” (v. 3). As a gentle companion and shepherd, God will not abandon His sheep, because He is Yahweh.

The first requirement for a sheep’s survival in arid lands is water. Rainy seasons will produce “green pastures” in

Canaan, and the sheep are prompted to recline amidst an abundant supply of food (v. 2). The shepherd leads the sheep to “quiet waters” for a drink. This could mean a natural body of water, one free of fast-flowing rapids that could frighten the sheep. But since herdsman of the region relied on wells to water flocks, “quiet” (NIV) or “still” (KJV)—a noun in the original language—could mean a resting place, as the Hebrew word appears elsewhere (Gen. 49:15; Num. 10:33; Deut. 12:9; Isa. 32:18). It is a place where the sheep feel free to lie down, a place of peace.

Once the immediate physical needs are met, the sheep are calm and untroubled (v. 3). The “soul” refers to a person’s entire being in this context. Translations will sometimes render the same word as “life” (compare Gen. 9:4; 19:17–20; 32:30; 44:30). It means that the psalmist—the sheep—feels rested to his very core. And the shepherd leads the way on an excellent trail. “Right” (NIV) or “righteousness” (KJV) frequently describe God’s faithfulness (compare Ps. 9:8). A faithful or righteous shepherd—as Yahweh certainly is—finds faithful or righteous paths for the sheep to walk.

The psalmist praises God for the protection found in His presence (v. 4). The divine shepherd does not avoid dark valleys, places that hold food or pools of water. Yet the dark valleys cast long shadows and bring a threat of predators, such as bandits or wild beasts. Without the shepherd, the sheep would be helpless. But the shepherd has come prepared—his “rod” and “staff” make the sheep feel secure. The rod is for protection, in case predators or thieves attack. The staff is for leaning on when climbing rocky ground. The shepherd can use the staff to pull a sheep back to safety. As a good shepherd, God has planned the journey and is prepared, whatever may come.

4. *Which needs does the psalmist say that the shepherd meets?*

5. *Why is God like a shepherd?*

6. *Where does the shepherd lead the sheep?*

The Shepherd King

Psalm 23:5–6 KJV

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Psalm 23:5–6 NIV

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Verses 1–4 compare God to a shepherd. But verses 5–6 introduce a set of images that do not apply to sheep or shepherds. After all, when do sheep dine at tables or drink from a cup (v. 5)? In verses 5–6, the psalmist compares God to a magnificent host. This could be another role-reversal for King David, since kings were expected to have large tables to host many guests. Now perhaps David imagines himself to be the guest at God’s table.

The “table” that God prepares is full of so many good things that it makes “enemies” jealous (v. 5). Since the previous verse described a passage through danger, these enemies might be highway robbers or thieves along the road. David made enemies while on his way to becoming king. David composed Psalm 63 as he fled into the wilderness, and it speaks of enemies seeking his life (Ps. 63:9–10).

But under the safety of God his host, the psalmist receives oil on his head (Ps. 23:5). The word “anoint” is not the same word for anointings of kings or priests. It is part of the table imagery, a blessing that God provides His guest. In ancient cultures, pleasant-smelling oils could be applied to the honored guests of a special meal. Psalm 104:15 says that God gives “oil to make their faces shine.” Oil for the head is a luxury, a show of God’s hospitality.

Likewise, God shares a cup of wine that is filled to

the brim (v. 5). For a weary traveler fresh off the road, a healthy cup of wine is welcome indeed! Abundant wine is a frequent image of God's provision (see, again, Ps. 104:15).

But the meal was also the seal of David's alliance with God. In ancient Israel, covenants were sometimes concluded with a meal that expressed the bonds of friendship (Ex. 24:8–11). The word translated "love" in Psalm 23:6 is the word used throughout the Old Testament for the friendly relations between the two parties of a covenant.

In the final verse, the psalmist turns his attention from the present to the future. Instead of being chased by evil (v. 4) or by enemies (v. 5), the psalmist expects that "goodness and mercy" (KJV) shall chase after him. The God who sends these good things to follow will also open His "house" as a place to reside. God's presence is not only available now; it is a gift that unfolds into the future. The psalmist expects to never leave the presence of God again. David would not have to beg God for evidences of His care; God would be eager to give them.

The Good Shepherd provides, and He protects the

sheep in the field. He also provides for his guests and protects them in the tent. This psalm is a beautiful picture of God's care and concern for His "flock."

7. What images of God are found in verses 5–6?

8. Is the psalmist speaking about the past, the present, or the future?



A wadi (gorge) in Israel where a shepherd might lead his sheep to find water and grass—a "valley of the shadow of death" (v. 4 KJV).

Photo: arie tennbaum/Israeli Pikiwiki project

God Protects Us amid All Kinds of Fears

People experience fears from all sorts of situations. Some fears might be phobias, such as intense fears of germs, snakes, or spiders. Other people might experience worry over whether or not they'll be able to make their next set of bills. A person might experience debilitating fear over a bad diagnosis. Many people experience anxiety over public speaking, confrontation, or other uncomfortable situations. People who suffer from fear may feel that they are being tormented, and their joy has been stolen.

For chronic fear, some people are forced to turn to doctors and medication to alleviate anxiety. There are folks who may suffer fear and stress from situations in life that are terribly difficult to navigate. How do you cope with fear in a world where there are many real things to be afraid of?

One way is to remember the words voiced in 2 Timothy 1:7: "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (KJV). David feared for his very life, but he didn't allow that fear to control his life. He cried out to God. He sang to God. He prayed to God. And he attested to the benefit of trusting God in the midst of his fears: "I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears" (Ps. 34:4) The best way to deal with fear is to present it to God in prayer, believing that He is a loving good shepherd, who will take care of His sheep, no matter what circumstances we face.

9. *Do you watch the news or upsetting shows? What kinds of events that you hear on the news cause you to fear?*

10. *What are some strategies that people use to cope with fear? Are they effective?*

11. *How do you combat fear in your daily life? Do you take your worries to God in prayer?*

A Man After God's Own Heart

The psalmist understood that God was his divine shepherd. He would guide him rightly, take care of him in any circumstance, and provide for him—even into eternity. Christians can look at his life as an example of how to interact with and place trust in Yahweh in all circumstances.

► *Reflect on a time when you were fearful. Did you take your fear to God in prayer? Did you find peace? Brainstorm how you can handle a problem you may be facing now, or in the future, by allowing God to shepherd you through it.*

Areas where you can allow God to become your shepherd:

Strategies for building a closer relationship with God:

KEY VERSE

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

—Psalm 23:6 KJV

Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

—Psalm 23:6 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of November 4 through November 10

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Revelation 19:1–10—The Lord God Almighty Reigns.
- Tue.** Psalm 147:1–6, 12–20—How Good to Sing God's Praises.
- Wed.** Psalm 148—Praise God from Heaven and Earth.
- Thu.** Luke 1:46–55—My Soul Magnifies the Lord.
- Fri.** Luke 1:68–79—Blessed Be the God of Israel.
- Sat.** Psalm 146—Praise the Lord, O My Soul!
- Sun.** Psalms 149–150—Let Everything that Breathes Praise God!

Songs of Praise

I mean, I was seconds away from colliding head-on with a car,” said Amari to the three other men sitting close to him in the auto repair shop. “I’ve never been so scared in my life.”

Amari had survived a harrowing accident about three weeks prior. The icy, snow-packed roads had caused one SUV to sideswipe Amari’s SUV, which made it spin and cross the center lane. With a desperate cry for help, Amari steered into the spin and was able to right himself and steer away from an oncoming car.

“I know you will be thanking the Lord for that for years to come, young man,” one of the workers said.

“Yes, sir. I certainly will,” said Amari. “I’ve told this story I don’t know how many times. It was nothing but the grace of God that kept me and everyone else safe. No one was injured in the accident. But it’s not only in this situation that God has shown Himself strong on my behalf. God has been good to me all of my life.”

“How old are you?” the man asked.

“I’m 27,” Amari answered.

“Well, you have a lot more living to do,” replied another man, sitting opposite from Amari. “But it’s good to hear young people acknowledge God.”

“Oh yes, sir,” said Amari. “As long as I have breath, I will praise my God.”

1. *Can one-word prayers like “Wow!” be as meaningful or even more meaningful than long prayers (Matt. 6:7–8)? Explain your answer.*

2. *Do you think every prayer should include “Forgive me, help me, thank You, and praise You”? Why or why not?*

3. *What things make you say “Wow” when you think about God?*

Refusing to Trust in People

Psalm 146:1–4 KJV

1 Praise ye the LORD.
Praise the LORD, O my soul.
2 While I live will I praise
the LORD: I will sing praises
unto my God while I
have any being.
3 Put not your trust in
princes, nor in the son of
man, in whom there is no
help.
4 His breath goeth forth,
he returneth to his earth; in
that very day his thoughts
perish.

Psalm 146:1–4 NIV

¹Praise the LORD.
Praise the LORD, my soul.
²I will praise the LORD all my
life;
I will sing praise to my God as
long as I live.
³Do not put your trust in
princes,
in human beings, who cannot
save.
⁴When their spirit departs, they
return to the ground;
on that very day their plans
come to nothing.

The psalmist begins by urging his “soul” to praise God. In the way this ancient writer is thinking, everyone is viewed as an indivisible whole: a person is not only a spirit who temporarily dwells in an earthly body that will be discarded at death. In the Old Testament, the soul denotes the entire person as a living being. God’s people are to worship Him with their entire being.

In verse 2, the poet states that he intends to praise God throughout his life. In the second line, the psalmist declares that he would sing praises to God as long as he lives. He would praise the Lord to his very last breath.

In verses 3 and 4, the poet warns his audience against placing their confidence in powerful people. These leaders are mortals who have no special abilities to deliver anyone from danger (v. 3). One day they, too, will die. All their cherished projects and dreams perish with them (v. 4).

4. *To what extent were God’s children to praise Him?*

5. *What was wrong with God’s children placing their trust in mere mortals?*

Depending Exclusively on God

Psalms 146:5–10 KJV

5 Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God:

6 Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is: which keepeth truth for ever:

7 Which executeth judgment for the oppressed: which giveth food to the hungry. The Lord looseth the prisoners:

8 The LORD openeth the eyes of the blind: the LORD raiseth them that are bowed down: the Lord loveth the righteous:

9 The LORD preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and widow: but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down.

10 The LORD shall reign for ever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. Praise ye the LORD.

Psalms 146:5–10 NIV

⁵Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God.

⁶He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—

he remains faithful forever.

⁷He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets prisoners free,

⁸the LORD gives sight to the blind,

the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down,

the LORD loves the righteous.

⁹The LORD watches over the foreigner

and sustains the fatherless and the widow,

but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.

¹⁰The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations.

Praise the LORD.

Trusting in human rulers brings sorrow. But when a person turns to “the God of Jacob” (Ps. 146:5) for help, he or she finds eternal joy in salvation. People who put their hope in God are truly “blessed.” This term denotes the abiding presence of joy in those who receive God’s favor.

In verse 6, the psalmist writes that God made “heaven and earth.” He also made the oceans and all the creatures in the seas. He is eternally “faithful” to keep every promise He makes. Believers find assurance in their faithful creator. God is the foundation of their faith and hope.

God defends the cause of the marginalized. He vindicates those who have been crushed by the wicked. He feeds the hungry. He releases the imprisoned (v. 7).

God enables the blind to see. He lifts people’s burdens. He is unfailing in His love for the upright (v. 8). The heavenly king protects the foreigner and sustains the orphan and the widow, but overturns the plans of the wicked.

The psalm closes by declaring God’s eternal reign. “Zion” refers to Jerusalem (the city of David). God eternally remains the king over His eternal city and its inhabitants. His children praise Him for His rule.

6. *What reason is there for looking to God for help?*

7. *What characterizes God’s rule over creation?*

8. *How does God deal differently with the righteous and the wicked?*

Praising the Lord

Psalm 150:1–6 KJV

1 Praise ye the LORD.
Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power.

2 Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness.

3 Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp.

Psalm 150:1–6 NIV

¹Praise the LORD.
Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty heavens.

²Praise him for his acts of power;
praise him for his surpassing greatness.

³Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,
praise him with the harp and lyre,

4 Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs.
 5 Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.
 6 Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.

⁴praise him with timbrel and dancing,
 praise him with the strings and pipe,
⁵praise him with the clash of cymbals,
 praise him with resounding cymbals.
⁶Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.
 Praise the LORD.

Verse 1 calls on worshipers to praise God in the “sanctuary” and “his mighty heavens.” These calls for a specific place encourage the worshipers to enter into God’s presence. We can almost hear the loud and joyful way it was performed at the Jerusalem temple.

The psalmist then provides reasons to worship God. They can praise Him for His “acts of power,” along with His abundant “greatness” (v. 2). He is able to perform deeds that are impossible for people to do. He is worthy of praise simply for being Himself.

Verses 3 through 5 detail various ways Israel could convey their praise. The psalm invites Israel to praise God by blowing a “trumpet,” playing the “harp and lyre” (two types of stringed instruments), beating the “timbrel” (hand drums), and “dancing.” The psalmist includes another type of “strings,” the “pipe” (or flute), and the “cymbals.” Worship was to be loud and full of joyous music.

Verse 6 summons worshipers and all living things to worship God. God is deserving of praise from every single person and thing that “has breath.”

The psalm ends just as it began: “Praise the LORD.” By beginning and ending the psalm with the same phrase, the psalmist emphasizes the simplicity of its command. The people are to praise God and His name.

9. *What reasons did the psalmist give for offering God praise?*

Trust Him!

For as long as Kelly could remember, she had loved kids. When she was four years old, she would beg her mom to let her hold her baby brother. And when she entered college, she'd tell her friends that all she wanted was to be a mother someday.

But now, she was in her mid-40s. She was single, and had no kids of her own. For a long time, she resented God. She was disappointed in Him. Hadn't she prayed for years to be a mother? Her prayers often seemed to be more in line with solemn laments than joyful worship.

Kelly confessed her pent up feelings to her friend Amanda over dinner one night.

"I've heard of a camp nearby that serves children in foster care. What if you tried that out this summer?" Amanda said.

Kelly was hesitant, but she agreed. When she began working at the camp, she praised God. She finally felt like she found her place. She could connect with the kids, love them, and teach them about Christ. She found some of her closest friends among her coworkers at the camp. She found people who shared the same love for children.

Kelly realized that God had given her a heart for children for a reason. Even though she never had kids of her own, she has dozens of kids to care for at the ministry.

She worshiped God for all He had done in her life. He had provided for her and had comforted her. He was her help, even when she struggled to praise Him with joy.

10. *Can you praise God if you struggle to trust Him? Explain your answer.*

11. *Why is praise for God mandatory?*

12. *When have you seen bad situations be a cause for praise?*

If You Can't Say Something Nice . . .

Did your mother ever say, “If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all”? Does praise mean we always say only “nice” things to and about God? Many of the psalms express natural human emotions of confusion, fear, anger, and disappointment to and about God. But they go on to express faith in God—though things might seem hopeless, He will right every wrong.

► *Give a personal example of a situation that incited a negative emotion toward God in you. How was that situation resolved (or how is it being resolved)? What good things can you see that came out of it? If you don't see changes in external circumstances, can you see how it has developed your character and spirituality? Is there someone in your life who might be encouraged to hear this story and what you learned?*

KEY VERSE

While I live will I praise the LORD: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being.
— Psalm 146:2 KJV

I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.
—Psalm 146:2 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of November 11 through November 17

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Psalm 28—Give Thanks through Song.
- Tue.** Ephesians 5:1–2, 15–20—Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs.
- Wed.** Psalm 69:1–6, 30–36—Magnify God with Thanksgiving.
- Thu.** Psalm 7:1–2, 6–17—Give Thanks to the Righteous Judge.
- Fri.** 1 Thessalonians 1—Thanks for Faithful Brothers and Sisters.
- Sat.** Philippians 4:4–9—Prayer and Supplication with Thanksgiving.
- Sun.** Psalm 100—Worship the Lord with Gladness.

A Song of Thanksgiving

All right, brother. You always come through the doors praising God!" said the usher who was holding a tray of Communion elements. Jayden was singing Hezekiah Walker's "Every Praise Is to Our God."

"Every word of worship with one accord," continued Jayden, selecting one of the elements. "Praise the Lord, sister."

Once in the sanctuary, Jayden sat on the right side of the room, with the song still on his lips. He arrived about three minutes before the countdown. Their church had a five-minute countdown digital clock that they broadcasted on the screens prior to worship.

Around him, people were getting in place for the morning worship. Jayden took a seat and bowed his head. He was grateful for another opportunity to praise God. His three-year-old was feeling much better, but Iyana wanted her to stay home for extra measure.

He had much to be thankful for: a godly, wonderful wife; a precious baby girl; a good job; his health and strength; a great church and pastor; and most of all, an awesome Lord and Savior! He was having some challenges with his older brother; and there had been some nagging, abdominal pain that he needed to have his doctor check out. But God was certainly due his praise.

Jayden lifted his head and sprung to his feet. The digital clock read: "9:58." It was almost time to get the party started. The Lord's praise was due!

1. *How has giving thanks to God lifted your spirit?*

2. *Do you sometimes find it hard to praise joyfully? Why?*

3. *How do songs of thanksgiving remind you of God's character?*

Worship the Lord

Psalm 100:1–3 KJV

A Psalm of praise.

1 Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands.

2 Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing.

3 Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Psalm 100:1–3 NIV

A Psalm. For giving grateful praise.

¹Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

²Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

³Know that the LORD is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his;

we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

The KJV refers to Psalm 100 as an ode of “praise,” while the NIV adds “for giving grateful praise.” Throughout Israel’s history, God demonstrated His unwavering commitment to His chosen people.

Verse 1 begins with the exhortation that the entire “earth” participate in praise. Everything and everyone in creation is to give God the worship He deserves. A king over one country might be deserving of reverence from the people in that one location. The God of the universe deserves worship and praise from everywhere and everyone.

The same Hebrew word translated “shout for joy” sometimes refers to the loud sound soldiers made in a war cry (see Josh. 6:5, 10, 20). In Psalm 100:1, God’s children have just as much energy and enthusiasm in their “joyful noise” (KJV) as in a fierce battle cry.

The psalmist imagines the worshipers joining together to express their “gladness” (v. 2) for His grace and goodness. They would signal this gratitude in God’s sacred “presence” through “singing” with joy. Their songs were often accompanied by instruments. In this psalm,

worshippers are overflowing with joy, which they openly express for the Lord. This psalm expresses that overflowing joy through emphasizing how loud the people worshiped.

As God's children assembled for corporate worship, they would declare that He was their creator (v. 5). He brought everything into existence. He created the living things—every person, every sea creature, every bird. He created the heavenly bodies—the sun, moon, and stars. Everything that you can see only exists because He created it. Because He is the creator of all things and all people, the Israelites praised Him.

The worshipers rejoice in that they “are his” (v. 3). They belong to the God who created everything. The Israelites belong to a loving God who has taken them in as His.

God's children are His prized possession. The Israelites celebrated this truth in their worship (Ex. 6:7; 19:5; Deut. 7:6; Isa. 43:1, 21; 44:2). They were not only His “people,” but also the “sheep of his pasture” (Ps. 100:3). God protected and provided for His people, like a shepherd guiding and watching over his well-tended flock (Ps. 95:6–7). The worshipers in Psalm 100 were overjoyed as they reflected on His guiding staff, and worshiped Him for it.

The Old Testament uses the shepherd motif many times, such as in the Psalms (such as Psalm 23; lesson 10). Ezekiel 34 records the Lord's prophecy against Israel's wicked rulers who did not “take care of the flock” (vv. 1–8). God pledged to hold them accountable (vv. 9–10). God promised to rescue His abused sheep from their enemies' clutches. God pledged to search for His scattered sheep, bring them back to their homeland, and feed them (vv. 11–13). The restored flock would graze in lush pastures and lie down in peace (vv. 14–15).

It was important to the Israelites that they would be ruled by a good shepherd. God contrasts these kings who did not care for their flock. He is the perfect shepherd, who would bring His sheep into safety and provide them with sustenance. The Israelites praised God for being the

shepherd they needed.

4. *What was the entire creation summoned to do?*

5. *What attitude should believers have in their relationship with the Lord?*

6. *What truths about the Lord did the psalmist affirm?*

7. *How did the psalmist portray God's relationship with His children?*

Give Thanks to the Lord

Psalm 100:4–5 KJV

4 Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.

5 For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

Psalm 100:4–5 NIV

⁴Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

⁵For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

The psalmist invites God's children to enter the "gates" of His temple (perhaps as a ceremonial procession) with an attitude of "thanksgiving." They would affirm that God rescued them from their enemies and provided for all their needs. The worshipers were also to offer "praise" to God in the "courts" of the sanctuary, such as words conveying homage to Him.

The "gates" and "courts" (Ps. 100:4) refer to the temple that Solomon built, where the Psalms may have been used in worship. The temple would have been regarded as a symbol of Israel's national identity. It functioned as the focal point for the religious, cultural, political, and economic life of the twelve tribes. In 586 BC, the Babylonians destroyed the temple and looted its treasures, as well as demolished Jerusalem and its walls.

Despite the suffering that God's people experienced, they continued to believe that He cared for them. Verse 5 affirms God's inherent goodness, along with the everlasting nature of His "mercy" (KJV).

The psalmist draws attention to God's "faithfulness" (NIV). This can refer to the Lord's trustworthiness. He is loyal to His people. He made a covenant with Moses on Mount Sinai, and promised that "although the whole earth is" His, they "will be for [Him] a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:5-6). He has an unwavering commitment to His people.

God's devotion to the people of Israel is everlasting. Just as His "love" for them lasts "forever," so, too, His "faithfulness" (or fidelity) to the promises He made to them endured throughout "all generations."

In giving "praise" to "his name" (v. 4), the Israelites were worshiping God for who He is. They were not simply worshiping Him for the actions He performed for them, such as being a good shepherd. They praised Him also for His own sake. The name of God, Yahweh, reminds worshipers of God as a whole. It is a humble expression in which the very syllables of God's name are deserving of praise. Outside of any wonder He may perform for His people, the Lord is worthy of all praise.

Nothing in "all creation" (Rom. 8:39) can drive a wedge between the "love of God" and His children, especially as it is seen in the Lord Jesus. "Neither height nor depth, nor anything else" throughout the universe could "separate" believers from Jesus' pardon, along with His "love" (Ps. 100:5) and "faithfulness," toward those whom He "called" (Rom. 8:28), "foreknew" (v. 29), "justified," and "glorified" (v. 30) in the Son.

Like the Israelites who praised God for who He is and what He did, so do believers today.

8. *What mindset should believers have when they gather for worship?*

9. *What reason did the psalmist give for expressing gratitude to God?*

How to Be Thankful

People must be incredibly joyful while giving thanks. That might seem obvious, but this joyfulness includes shouting and singing to the Lord as they worship Him: “Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs” (Ps. 100:1–2).

These people are shouting and singing because He is the Lord of creation. He has created every one of them: “It is he who made us, and we are his” (v. 3). No one is a cosmic accident. Everyone is an amazing creation, God’s artistry, crafted in ways that science still doesn’t understand. The human body, in all its marvelous complexity, gives a glimpse into the great work God has done in creating every individual person.

We must also understand that we belong to Him: “We are his people, the sheep of his pasture” (v. 3). When a person tries to live apart from the “pasture,” he might self-destruct. When a person knows and follows God, she belongs in His safe pasture.

The only shepherd worth following is a good shepherd. God “is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations” (v. 5). How often do you find a love that lasts forever? Or a person who loves you faithfully regardless of what you say and do?

When people know how to be thankful, they can “enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.” With great joy and a better understanding of who He is, they can “give thanks to him and praise his name” (v. 4).

10. *Why is being thankful tied to understanding God is our creator and shepherd?*

11. *When was the last time you felt as if you were in God’s very presence?*

12. *Can you be a “quiet” person, yet still be incredibly joyful in the Lord?*

Into His Presence

Since a proclamation by President Lincoln in 1863, Americans have been celebrating Thanksgiving. Sadly, this holiday is often more about food and football than giving to God the praise and thanks He deserves.

► *This week, commit to making the upcoming holiday a time of giving thanks and celebrating. Plan to have singing, Scripture reading, prayer, and other activities that will lead you into His presence as you praise His name.*

KEY VERSE

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.

— Psalm 100:4 KJV

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

— Psalm 100:4 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of November 18 through November 24

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** Matthew 1:18–23—God Is with Us through Christ.
- Tue.** Exodus 33:12–23—My Presence Will Go with You.
- Wed.** Exodus 34:1–9—A Glimpse of the Merciful God.
- Thu.** Psalm 16—Complete Joy in God's Presence.
- Fri.** Matthew 18:15–20—Where Two or Three Are Gathered.
- Sat.** Matthew 28:16–20—I Am with You Always.
- Sun.** Psalm 139:1–12—God Searches and Knows Us.

God's Promised Presence

Nia turned around to look at the person who had tapped her shoulder.

"I love your hair!" the woman said. "Who did it?"

"I did," said Nia as she advanced in the line. "Thank you."

Nia paid for her Caffè Americano and went to the coffee bar to add some sugar and cream. A few minutes later, she was joined by the woman, who introduced herself as Kayla. When Kayla learned Nia had on a hairpiece that she had made, Kayla was intrigued.

"I have alopecia," Kayla said. "I lost my hair in elementary school."

Nia shared her own story of hair thinning and pulled up photos on her phone of the hairpieces she made.

"Do you have a shop and a card?"

Nia had neither. She found it difficult to see the value in her abilities.

"You are too negative about yourself," a friend had said. "God knows you inside and out. He knows the gifts He's put in you."

Kayla was the tenth person who had approached Nia about her hairpieces just this week!

Nia was in awe of a God who knew her so well and was always finding ways to bless her, despite herself. She realized she had to yield. Nia would begin making moves to market and sell her hairpieces.

1. *How does God's presence make you feel right now? Explain your answer.*

2. *How would you comfort someone who may be feeling alone?*

3. *Explain this statement: "Let all your deeds be done as if God is sitting next to you."*

The Lord Knows Everything about Us

Psalm 139:1–6 KJV

To the chief Musician, a
Psalm of David

1 O LORD, thou hast
searched me, and known
me.

2 Thou knowest my down-
sitting and mine uprising,
thou understandest my
thought afar off.

3 Thou compassest my
path and my lying down,
and art acquainted with all
my ways.

4 For there is not a word in
my tongue, but, lo, O LORD,
thou knowest it altogether.

5 Thou hast beset me
behind and before, and laid
thine hand upon me.

6 Such knowledge is too
wonderful for me; it is
high, I cannot attain unto it.

Psalm 139:1–6 NIV

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

¹You have searched me, LORD,
and you know me.

²You know when I sit and when
I rise;
you perceive my thoughts
from afar.

³You discern my going out and
my lying down;
you are familiar with all my
ways.

⁴Before a word is on my tongue
you, LORD, know it
completely.

⁵You hem me in behind and
before,
and you lay your hand upon
me.

⁶Such knowledge is too
wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.

This song of praise seems to arise from a dangerous situation. In verse 19, the psalmist begins talking about “wicked” and “bloodthirsty” people who were his foes. These unrighteous people misused God’s name, probably by calling down curses on His faithful servants. But the psalmist is confident that God is able to deal with evil, and the psalmist expresses zeal for the Lord and His standards of virtue (vv. 19–22).

Before the psalmist writes of any earthly peril, he describes God’s awareness of him. The Hebrew verb rendered “searched” (v. 1) can also be translated “to investigate” or “to examine thoroughly.” This intense

investigation was the basis for God's knowledge of the psalmist.

The creator is aware of every thought people have and every action they perform (2 Chron. 28:9). He can objectively and fairly evaluate the actions of people because He knows everything (1 Sam. 2:3). All wisdom and counsel reside with Him (Job 12:13), and "his understanding has no limit" (Ps. 147:5). There is nothing in the universe that is hidden from God's sight. Everything is exposed by His gaze (Heb. 4:13).

God's awareness of all things serves two purposes. First, everyone is accountable to God for their actions. No one will do evil and get away with it. Second, the Creator's awareness reminds His people that He knows their circumstances and reaches out in love (Gen. 16:13).

God's knowledge of the psalmist was specific. Psalm 139:2 refers to when he would sit down and stand up, which points to his daily activities. Even though God is in heaven, He remained cognizant of the psalmist's thoughts and understood his motives.

There was no doubt in the psalmist's mind that before his mouth framed a word, the Lord was already fully aware of what the king would say (v. 4). Regardless of the dangers he might face, God went before him and after him.

The Lord had placed His hand of blessing on the psalmist (v. 5). He admitted that God's awareness of him was so extraordinary that it went beyond his comprehension. He was unable to fathom God's infinite knowledge of him (v. 6).

4. *Which aspects of the psalmist's life did God know about?*

5. *How extensive was God's knowledge of what the psalmist said?*

6. *How did the psalmist respond to the fact that God knew everything about him?*

The Spirit of the Lord Is Present Everywhere

Psalm 139:7–12 KJV

7 Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

8 If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.

9 If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;

10 Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

11 If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.

12 Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.

Psalm 139:7–12 NIV

⁷Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

⁸If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

⁹If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,

¹⁰even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

¹¹If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,"

¹²even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

In poetic fashion, the psalmist highlights the impossibility of escaping God's presence. He describes the futility of trying to flee from God by going to heaven or the realm of the dead. It's as if he were saying, "If I ascended as high as I could, or descended to the lowest possible depth, I could never escape Your reach."

Suppose the poet made the rising sun his chariot and raced to the utmost reach of the western horizon (v. 9)? Even if he could somehow settle down on the other side of

the Mediterranean Sea (which lies west of Israel), the Lord would still be there to afford support every hour of every day (v. 10). Unlike the idols of surrounding nations, God is fully present to protect and guide His people on every point of every map.

The psalmist describes another means of escape: hiding (vv. 11–12). He envisions a situation in which the “darkness” would obscure his presence like a thick piece of fabric would cover a person’s body. He also imagined asking the “light” of day to suddenly change into “night” all around him.

Adam and Eve, after transgressing God’s directive, tried to conceal themselves from Him. They sewed fig leaves together in an attempt to cover their nakedness. When the cool evening breeze began to blow, they sensed God’s presence within Eden and tried to hide from Him among the trees (Gen. 3:7–8). None of their efforts succeeded.

The psalmist dismisses all attempts at escape. He discerned that the creator God could see in darkness as well as in light. We cannot escape God. Once we have recognized the futility of any attempt to evade and escape, we can begin to accept that God is everywhere, just as we can joyfully accept that He knows everything about us.

Daniel, while in exile in Babylon, affirmed a similar truth. In an expression of praise, he declared that God unveiled realities that were “deep and hidden” (Dan. 2:22). God knows everything that is hidden in “darkness,” even though the infinitely glorious “light” of heaven blazed all around Him.

7. *What did David intuitively realize about the Spirit’s presence?*

8. *Where could David go to get away from the Spirit’s presence?*

9. *What was comforting to David about the Spirit’s all-encompassing presence?*

Never Will I Leave You

One of the greatest promises God has given His people is that He will never leave them nor forsake them. This promise brings peace and comfort. Every child wants to know that a parent will always be there for him or her. It does not matter if you make a mistake. God will always be there. In fact, one of His names is Jehovah-Shamman—the Lord is there (Ezek. 48:35).

Many people suffer from abandonment trauma, which results from being physically and emotionally neglected. The people who suffer from this describe its effects as extremely painful and like they cannot breathe.

“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!” (Isa. 49:15). What an amazing and awesome thought to know you cannot hide, outrun, or distract the presence of God from your life. God is always there.

Although there are some parents who have no compassion and will abandon their children, God says He never will. Statistics reveal that nearly 35 million U.S. children have experienced one or more types of childhood trauma, including abandonment.

Thank God for His commitment to us. What a great love and compassion He has for His own. As the prophet Jeremiah says, “The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness’” (Jer. 31:3).

10. *How does it make you feel knowing that God is ever-present?*

11. *What disadvantages do you see if God is ever-present with us?*

12. *How do you feel if you add your name to Jeremiah 31:3 (i.e., “I have loved Grace with an everlasting love”)?*

You Know Me

What an amazing feeling for someone to know you. If you are known, you do not have to explain your thoughts and actions or introduce yourself. You are comfortable and at peace. God knows us. He doesn't need any introductions. We are so known to God that He knows every strand of hair on our head. "Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (Luke 12:7). You are worthy of being known.

► *Write a gratitude letter to God, showing your appreciation for His constant presence in your life. Include the moments you did your best to please God. Also include moments when you know you disappointed God, yet He remained faithful.*

KEY VERSE

O lord, thou hast searched me, and known me.

—Psalm 139:1 KJV

You have searched me, LORD, and you know me.

—Psalm 139:1 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of November 25 through December 1

(See *The Quiet Hour and Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Luke 3:23–38—We Belong to Christ's Family.
- Tue.** Psalm 128—A Household Built by God.
- Wed.** Ruth 1:1, 3, 6–18—Determined Loyalty.
- Thu.** Ruth 2:1–3, 17–23—An Act of Kindness.
- Fri.** Matthew 12:46–50—Bound Together by More than DNA.
- Sat.** Ruth 3:1–13—Daring Faith.
- Sun.** Ruth 4:9–17—God Has Not Abandoned You.

NOTES • IDEAS • PRAYER REQUESTS

• QUOTES • THOUGHTS • QUESTIONS • THINGS TO REMEMBER •

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COMPREHENSIVE BIBLE STUDY
Lesson Cycle

FOR 2022-2025

	SEPTEMBER	DECEMBER	MARCH	JUNE
2022/23	<p>God's Exceptional Choice (Studies in Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Judges, 1 Samuel, Ephesians)</p>	<p>From Darkness to Light (Studies in 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Joel, Luke, 1 Corinthians, 2 Timothy, James, 1 Peter)</p>	<p>Jesus Calls Us (Studies in the Gospels, Acts)</p>	<p>The Righteous Reign of God (Studies in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Matthew, Romans, Galatians, 1 Corinthians)</p>
2023/24	<p>God's Law Is Love (Studies in Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians)</p>	<p>Faith That Pleases God (Studies in Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Chronicles, Proverbs, Isaiah, Daniel, Habakkuk, Matthew, Luke, Romans, Hebrews)</p>	<p>Examining Our Faith (Studies in the Gospels, Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthians, 1 Peter, Jude)</p>	<p>Hope in the Lord (Studies in Psalms, Lamentations, Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthians, Colossians, Hebrews, 1 Thessalonians, Titus, 1 John)</p>
2024/25	<p>Worship in the Covenant Community (Studies in Genesis, Exodus, 1-2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Psalms)</p>	<p>*A King Forever and Ever (Studies in Ruth, 2 Samuel, Psalms, Matthew, Luke)</p>	<p>Costly Sacrifice (Studies in Exodus, Leviticus, Hebrews, 1 John, Matthew, Revelation, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah)</p>	<p>Sacred Altars and Holy Gifts (Studies in Genesis, the Gospels, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Hebrews, 1 Peter)</p>



Coming Up Next Quarter

December 2024, January, February 2025

A King Forever and Ever

The winter quarter explores the biblical teaching about God's reign. Unit 1 has lessons showing key moments in the history of Jesus's ancestors, how John the Baptist prepared the way for a Savior, how Jesus's birth brings good news to the world, and how the "Son of David" bestows mercy on those in need.

The psalms in Unit 2 extol the reign of God. They show comfort in the assurance of His reign, praise Him as the eternal and all-powerful king, and recount His merciful and powerful acts as ruler of an everlasting kingdom.

Lessons in Unit 3 from Matthew show Jesus explaining the nature and obligations of kingdom life to His disciples—what it means to pray, the resistance to the kingdom in this world, and the reward for those who give up much to follow Him.

Comprehensive Bible Study lessons are organized according to a thematic study of the Bible following the International Sunday School Lessons series. In six years, this cycle will touch on the Bible's key themes through studies of books in both the Old and New Testaments.

LEADING PEOPLE TO WORSHIP



An early 20th century photo of the Jordan River valley near Jericho. Lot saw "the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt" (Gen. 13:10) and decided to settle there, near the notoriously sinful town of Sodom.

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Tradition says that this tree was one of "the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where [Abraham] pitched his tents. There he built an altar to the LORD" (Gen. 13:18).

Matson Collection/The Library of Congress

A relief of the Assyrian king Sennacherib. When Hezekiah prayed for God to "deliver us from [Sennacherib's] hand" (2 Kings 19:19), the prophet Isaiah said that God "heard your prayer concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria" (v. 20) and delivered Jerusalem from the Assyrians.

Photo: Timo Roller



When God's people experience His goodness, they often find that the only fitting response is worship. The Old Testament provides numerous examples of leaders who praise Him in all types of situations.

Abram worshiped God by building an altar after he settled in Mamre at Hebron (Gen. 13:18). After Abram let his nephew Lot have the land toward Sodom, God said He would give the other land to Abram and his offspring forever and make Abram's offspring "like the dust of the earth" (v. 16).

After God's temple was completed in Jerusalem, Solomon declared God's goodness and faithfulness to His people and asked Him to continue to be faithful to His people and to hear their prayers for provision and forgiveness in times of affliction.

Hezekiah also led God's people in worship—even at the brink of the potential destruction of Jerusalem. He "went up to the temple of the LORD and spread out [the message] before the LORD" (2 Kings 19:14), asking that God "deliver us from [the Assyrians'] hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, alone, are God" (v. 19).

When King Josiah heard God's law (see 2 Chron. 34), he led God's people in worship by re-instituting the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. He ensured "the entire service of the LORD was carried out" (2 Chron. 35:16) including all the "offering of burnt offerings on the altar of the LORD."



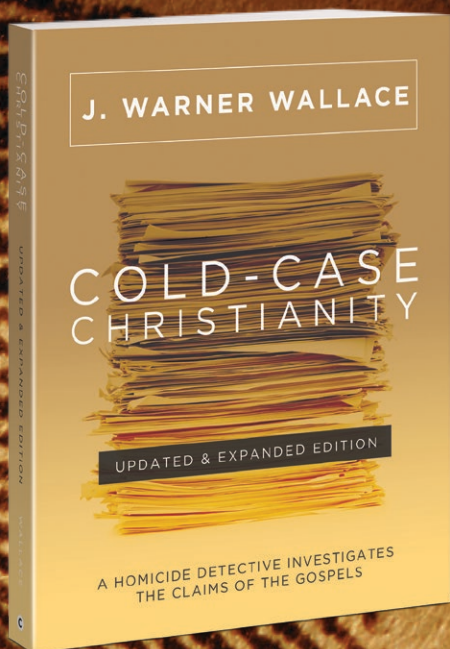
This relief from the first-century synagogue in Capernaum is believed to show the ark of the covenant on wheels being moved. King Josiah told the Levites for the Passover celebration to "Put the sacred ark in the temple that Solomon son of David king of Israel built. It is not to be carried about on your shoulders" (2 Chron. 35:3).

Avishai Teicher via the PixiWiki - Israel free image collection project



Solomon dedicates the temple in this painting by James Tissot (1836–1902).

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HOW DO WE KNOW THE BIBLE IS TRUE?

Homicide detective J. Warner Wallace applies ten common rules of evidence to make the case for Christianity in this updated and expanded edition of the apologetic classic that has changed lives around the world.



A devout atheist, **J. Warner Wallace** couldn't imagine believing in the Christian faith—until he applied the same step-by-step investigative process he utilized as a homicide detective to the case for Christianity. In light of the ten common rules of evidence he'd used to solve crimes throughout his career, Wallace could no longer deny the truth of Jesus Christ. And his life was never the same.