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Psalms

my sentiments exactly



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Psalms

my sentiments exactly



by Kathy Bruins


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Grand Rapids, Michigan

*Praise the LORD, my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—
who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,
who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*
—Psalm 103:1-5

We are grateful for the many comments and helpful suggestions of interested small groups and leaders who contributed to the development of this study.

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Glossary

Abraham—father of the Jewish people (Israel), renowned for his faith in God’s promises (Gen. 12:1-7; 15:6; Heb. 11:8-16). Also called “the father of all who believe” in Christ (Rom. 4:11).

angels—supernatural beings created by God to be messengers, to carry out God’s will in this world, and to serve and care for all who belong to God (Ps. 91:11-12).

Canaan—the land God promised to give to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 12:5-7). Canaan was located along the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea; from its southern border near the Dead Sea it ranged almost as far north as Damascus.

chaff—the covering of a seed (such as wheat) that is disposable, worthless for food.

covenant—a mutually binding agreement between two parties. In the Old Testament God made covenants with his chosen people Israel in which he promised to be their God, and they pledged to be faithful to him. These agreements form the basis of their relationship with God.

cup—a metaphor referring to the blessing (hospitality) of a drink that a visitor (especially a thirsty traveler) would receive from a host. People who follow God (the righteous) will enjoy the cup of blessing (Ps. 23:5), but

people who go their own way (the wicked) will suffer the cup of wrath (ultimate destruction—Ezek. 23:32-34; Rev. 14:8-10)

David—Israel’s greatest king in the Old Testament. The Lord promised that one of David’s descendants would rule faithfully on his throne forever (2 Sam. 7). As Matthew 1 shows, Jesus Christ is that “Son of David” who will rule as King forever.

Egypt—the powerful nation to which the family of Jacob (Israel) moved during a great famine. Many years later the Israelites became slaves there. God eventually delivered them and brought them into the promised land of Canaan (see Gen. 15; Ex. 1-12; Josh. 1-11).

faith—defined in Hebrews 11:1 as “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” Can be defined in simple terms as “belief and trust.” True saving faith is a gift that consists of knowledge and confidence—a sure knowledge by which we accept as true all that God has revealed in his Word, and confidence that all our sins are forgiven for Jesus’ sake.

grace—God’s undeserved favor and forgiving love. Jesus is the full expression of God’s grace for the salvation of all who believe in him as Lord and Savior (Eph. 2:8-10).

Ham—a son of Noah. Ham’s descendants lived in northeastern Africa (Egypt) and in the land of Canaan. Ham’s sons were named Cush, Egypt, Canaan, and Put (Gen. 9:18; 10:6). See also **Canaan, Egypt**.

holy—pure; set apart to bring glory to God.

hope—in combination with faith this means looking ahead in solid trust to the fulfillment of all God’s promises (Heb. 7:19; 11:1).

idols—anything worshiped or honored ahead of or in place of God. Idolatry can mean bowing down to a physical image of a god; it can also mean allowing one’s possessions or desires to become more important than God.

iniquity—sin, disobedience to God’s will

Isaac—Abraham and Sarah’s son, who inherited all the promises God made with Abraham.

Israel—God’s chosen people, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whom God blessed in order to bless all the nations of the earth (Gen. 12:1-3; 2 Sam.7; Ps. 72:17; Matt. 1:20-25).

Jacob—Isaac’s son whom God renamed Israel (Gen. 32:28) and who became the patriarch of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Jerusalem—Israel’s historic capital city. As the location for God’s temple, it became the center for the Jewish religion and the spiritual headquarters of the nation of Israel.

Joseph—a favorite son of Jacob, sold by his brothers into slavery, who later became second in command of all Egypt and through whom God provided food for many nations during a great famine (Gen. 37-50).

justice—the results of righteous leadership and living, by which everyone is treated with righteousness and valued with dignity as an imagebearer of God.

lament—a deep expression of grief

law of the Lord—(the law of God given Moses) the Ten Commandments and hundreds of ceremonial and social laws given by God to the nation of Israel and prescribed in Genesis through Deuteronomy.

libation—in ancient religions, the act of pouring out a liquid offering (such as blood or wine) to a false god.

mercy—this term is often used to describe showing kindness to someone in distress. To be more precise, it refers to showing leniency by holding back punishment even if justice calls for it.

Moses—the Old Testament prophet who led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and brought them to the promised land of Canaan. During his leadership Moses received from God and taught Israel the laws that would govern them as God’s chosen people.

portion—a person’s share in an inheritance (Ps. 16:5)

praise—in the Psalms, to glorify, honor, and acclaim the Lord as the one true God, our Creator, Provider, and Savior.

prophet—someone who speaks God’s message (see Deut. 18:17-19); in the Old Testament this was generally a person who preached God’s Word and (in some cases) foretold the future as revealed by the Lord.

psalm—a Hebrew poem designed for prayer and song in worship of the Lord

redeem—to buy back; to deliver or set free through a ransom payment or other provision

righteous—considered right with God. “The righteous” (Ps. 1:6) are often described as those who believe and obey God and earnestly seek to follow God’s ways. They are also credited as righteous by faith (see Gen. 5:21-24; 6:9, 22; 15:6; Ps. 1:1-3, 6; Hab. 2:4). As God’s people, we are called to be righteous, and today we know we are credited with Christ’s righteousness: we are made right with God through Jesus’ death and given the ability to live in right relationships with others through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 3:21-4:25).

sin—disobedience to God; refers to breaking God’s law (1 John 3:4).

temple—Located in Jerusalem, the Old Testament temple was the dwelling place for God’s name, the center of worship and sacrifice, and the site of major Israelite festivals.

wicked—anything or anyone that ignores, rejects, mocks, or otherwise rebels against God (Ps. 1:1). In the Bible, wickedness is often described as foolishness, the opposite of wisdom, which comes from following God. “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Ps. 14:1), so that person follows his own way or the way of the world, and heads toward everlasting destruction.

How to Use This Study

This Bible study aims to help people engage in lively discussion and Bible discovery without having studied the text before doing each lesson together.

Glossary

Near the front of this booklet is a glossary that can be useful for understanding the meanings of terms mentioned in Psalms.

Questions for Discussion

The main questions for discussion are numbered and are in bold print. Along with these questions you'll find points "to think about as you discuss" to help spark ideas for responding to each main question. In addition, you'll often see questions that help us connect the story to everyday life under the subheading "What does this mean to me?"

Please do not feel you have to answer every question in the lesson material. Our goal is to help make Bible study a creative, flexible, exploratory exercise in which you engage with your group and grow to know God and each other better.

Follow-up Ideas

At the end of each lesson are Explore! ideas that you might like to use for follow-up. These include activities that can help you learn more about

items of interest related to the lesson and apply your learning to everyday life. There are also music and video suggestions.

This study also includes a special section in each lesson called Engaging with the Psalms. It invites you to connect with God in various ways, ranging from reading and meditating on a number of psalms, to using the psalms in prayer and song, to writing your own psalms as prayer letters to God.

Break Away (at-home readings)

After the study and follow-up material for each lesson you'll find inspirational readings for use at home. Take a break with God and do some thinking about the lesson material and how the Lord can use it to shape your life. If you like, clip these pages out and set them in places around your home or at work where they can remind you to spend time with God. You might also like to memorize some of the Scriptures used in these pieces.

An Invitation and Prayer of Commitment

If you're searching for a relationship with God, or studying with a friend who is searching, see An Invitation (to believe and commit to God) and a Prayer of Commitment provided at the back of this booklet. These can be helpful in talking one-

to-one with God or with someone who is ready to make a faith commitment to God.

Leader's Notes

At the Faith Alive website page featuring this Bible study—see www.FaithAliveResources.org, search for “Psalms: My Sentiments Exactly,” and click on the link to “Leader’s Notes”—you’ll find tips for leading this small group study.

We wish you God’s blessing as you participate in Bible study together. Have fun as you learn and grow closer to God and one another!

Introduction

The Bible's book of Psalms is a flowing tapestry of thought-provoking prayers, songs of joy and lament, wise teachings, prophecy, history lessons, and beautiful poetry—with inspiring threads of thanks and praise as well as raw human emotion running through it.

These prayer letters to God help us understand the human condition and what God can accomplish for us and through us. Emotions are at the core of the psalms, and although we are not to be directed only by our emotions, this book recognizes the range of all our thoughts and feelings, showing that we can bring them honestly to our faithful, loving God. No matter the genre of the psalm, there is always a sentiment from the writer that we can connect with and understand—and thus feel understood.

In this study we'll investigate the main psalm genres of wisdom, lament, trust, grace and mercy, thanksgiving, kingship, and praise. Although part of the goal of our study is to learn more about and grow in appreciation of the psalms, we'll find that the psalms themselves help us grow in knowing God. In the poetry of the psalms, we discover fulfillment of prophecies in Christ, discern true wisdom, and rise to new levels of worship and praise.

The psalms point us to the Lord our God, our Rock and Redeemer, our refuge and strength, our faithful provider, keeper, and friend. And they are as much letters to us from the covenant-keeping Lord as they are postings from his people—a variety of writers from ancient Israel whose timeless expressions connect us with God still today.

In this journey through the psalms, may you find new blessings and reach new heights in your relationship with God.

Lesson 1

Wisdom or Foolishness?

Psalm 1

Every day we are faced with opportunities to make choices. Some choices seem to be more important than others, but, overall, the path of choices we make tends to mold our character. Our choices say a lot about us, and they affect who we are and who we will become. Our choices also affect the people around us. It is not true to think that what we do won't affect anyone else. Weighing our options is more important than we often realize.



Opener (optional)

Who do you think is the wisest person on earth? What makes that person seem wise?

Psalm 1:1-2

1. What does it mean to be blessed? What blessings have you experienced in your life?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- blessings that may be taken for granted
- experiences in your life that originally did not seem like blessings, but turned out to be

“Blessed is . . .”

These opening words of Psalm 1 are a *beatitude*, a declaration of blessedness. Many psalms use this encouraging form of teaching to remind believers of God's care, mercy, and love (see, for example, Ps. 32:1-2; 41:1; 84:4-5; 106:3; 128:1; 144:15). Jesus also used beatitudes in his teaching. The best-known examples are in his Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:3-12).

“Blessed” . . . “Delight”

Some versions of the Bible translate the word for “blessed” in verse 1 as “happy.” This is a more literal translation of the Hebrew word *’asrey*, but this Hebrew word refers more to deep, profound joy and peace in the Lord (a sense of blessedness) rather than to a feeling of happiness, which can be fleeting. Our word *happy* comes from the root word *hap*, which means “chance” and gives us the words *haply*, *happen*, and *happenstance*. The Hebrew word *’asrey* has nothing to do with chance.

Note a parallel with the word “delight” (Hebrew, *hepes*) in verse 2. This word has nothing to do with chance either (though it might remind us of our word *happy*); instead, it refers again to deep, profound joy.

As you read more of the psalms, you’ll find lots of terms used in parallel—and many other poetic devices as well.

2. What are the choices described in verse 1? Do any of them connect with experiences in your life? What progression do you see in the actions described here?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- whether your thoughts and actions change depending on who you are with
- temptations and how you handle them

3. What thoughts come to mind when you think of “the law of the LORD” (v. 2)? Do you usually think of “delighting” in God’s law? Why or why not? How might that be possible?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- laws of nature (such as gravity, sunrise, seasons)
- civil and national laws, and their purposes
- law of God (see Ex. 20:1-17; Matt. 22:37-40) (see box on next page)

What is the “law of the Lord”?

In Psalm 1, the phrase “law of the Lord” refers to the *Torah*, the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy). These are also often called the five books of Moses, who received the law directly from God (see Ex. 19-31) and taught the law to God’s people Israel. The Hebrew word *Torah* means teaching. The *Torah* included 613 commands.

Jesus fulfilled God’s law perfectly and completely and then gave his perfect life as a substitute for ours because, as sinners, we could not keep the law. Because he did all that, the sacrifices and other ceremonial laws of the Old Testament are no longer necessary (Gal. 3; Heb. 7-10). Instead, empowered by God’s Spirit living in us, we are now called to follow the heart of God’s law as our guide for faithful living, summarized in the Ten Commandments and elsewhere (see Ex. 20:1-17; Mic. 6:8; Matt. 22:37-40).

4. How would you describe meditation? Could a person actually meditate day and night on God’s law? What do you think this means? What would be the benefits of meditating on God’s law?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- instruction in Joshua 1:8
- mention of meditation in other psalms (for example, see Ps. 39:3; 119:97-99, 105-112; 143:5)

Note: At this point you may want to take a few moments to read through the rest of Psalm 1 so that you can picture it as a whole. What are the main points of this psalm?

The Two Ways

Psalm 1 sets the tone for the book of Psalms by showing the contrast between living wisely or foolishly. A wise person is one who honors God, tries to follow God faithfully, and is counted righteous (Ps. 37:30-31; 111:10; see Gen. 15:6; Hab. 2:4). A foolish person disregards God, does as he or she sees fit, and is counted wicked (see Ps. 14:1, 4; 53:1, 4; 74:18; 75:22; 107:17). These basic principles do not describe many other factors that enter into daily living and the process of salvation, but they are nonetheless true.

The Lord saves us by his grace through Jesus Christ. We are not saved by our own efforts. But once we belong to him, we are called to live for him (Eph. 2:8-10). If we disregard God and go our own way, we walk the path toward destruction.

Psalm 1:3

5. What are the characteristics of a tree, and how do they help us describe the life of a person who honors the Lord?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- Jesus' teaching in John 15:1-8

What does this mean to me?

- Describe a time when you planted something. How can this be compared to the tree (life of a believer) in verse 3? What is the significance of the tree being planted by a stream of water?

Streams of water were rare in the semi-arid area of ancient Palestine, so to have a free-flowing stream rather than a stagnant pool of water was a great blessing.

6. What makes a leaf wither? What does a withered leaf look like compared to a healthy leaf? Compare this with the difference between a person whose spiritual life has withered and a person with a healthy spiritual life. How does a spiritual life wither?

7. What does it mean to prosper? What are some examples of prosperity that you are familiar with? What enables people to be prosperous?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- Solomon became king of Israel after his father, David. He became very prosperous. How? (Read 1 Kings 3:7-14.)

8. Everyone experiences failure or a setback at one time or another. Why might God allow that?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- failures of people you've heard about in the Bible
- failures of people you know
- challenges in life described in Heb. 11:1-12:13

Psalm 1:4-6

9. Who are the wicked? What are their characteristics, according to this psalm?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- Psalm 140:8; Proverbs 12:12 (see also box at right)

What does this mean to me?

- What draws us to walk independently from God?

Wicked?

Wicked in Hebrew means to be loose or unstable, not filled with peace or aiming for peace. This is demonstrated in Isaiah 57:20-21: "The wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. 'There is no peace,' says my God, 'for the wicked.'" Sin happens when we go our own way, as stated in Isaiah 53:6: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way." Then we suffer the consequences of straying from God. In Old Testament wisdom, wickedness is also foolishness, a way of life that disregards and even mocks God: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, their deeds are vile. . . . Do all these evildoers know nothing?" (Ps. 14:1-4). In this context, knowledge of God is lacking, and if God doesn't intervene in their lives, the wicked will continue on their way toward destruction. Thankfully, Christ has taken on himself "the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6), and through him we can be saved. (See also Rom. 1:18-32; Eph. 2:1-10.)

Chaff is the covering of a seed (such as wheat) that is disposable, worthless for food. In ancient times, wheat was often threshed manually by throwing shovelfuls of it into the air so that the wind would blow the chaff away. The clean, wholesome wheat kernels then fell to the ground and were good for food.

10. What do you think it means that “the LORD watches over the way of the righteous” (Ps. 1:6)?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- Genesis 28:15; Joshua 1:1-9; Psalm 101:6; Psalm 121

Note: If you have additional time, discuss the following questions to explore Jesus’ teachings about living for him, the Righteous One.

11. Read Luke 15:1-7. What does Jesus teach and show about interacting with people who don’t know God? With people who have walked away from God? (See also John 8:2-11.)

12. What do you think of the idea of the judgment of the wicked? What do you think they would like to use as a defense? What will their outcome be?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:43-48; 7:1-5, 24-29; 25:31-46

More to Think About

- Reflect on some major choices you have made in the past. How have those affected your life and the lives of others? What insights from Psalm 1 might help you make good choices in the future?



Explore!

- Look up some insightful books on the psalms, such as commentaries by Derek Kidner (Tyndale, 2009), *The Book of Psalms* by Robert Alter (Norton, 2009), *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* by W. Phillip Keller (Zondervan, 2008), and *150: Finding Your Story in the Psalms* by Kevin Adams (Faith Alive, 2011).
- On a video site such as www.netflix.com, search “choice” and select from various dramas about important choices to make. Some of these are gripping dramas, but they can also be thought-provoking. While viewing or pondering such dramas, keep in mind some questions like these:
 - What would I do in that person’s place?
 - Which choice would be best?
 - How would my choice honor God?
- Read Neal Plantinga’s book *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Eerdmans, 1995). This book helps us gain a clear understanding of sin, going deeper into how humans become involved in sin, and how it takes away peace (*shalom*) in the life of an individual and in society.
- A classic book on the subject of making wise choices is *The Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan (1678). A variety of updated versions are available at www.amazon.com and other outlets.
- Read a section of Psalm 119 in your Bible or at www.biblegateway.com each day and meditate on the wisdom it contains. Each segment of this psalm begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet—so we might even call it “the ABC’s of wisdom.” Read also Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 and the book of James for some helpful New Testament wisdom. Ask the Lord to help you apply this wisdom to your life, through the power of his Spirit. See also John 15; 1 Corinthians 13; and Galatians 5:22-25.

Engaging with the Psalms

Psalm-based activities for growing in your relationship with God.

I'm Sorry, God

Psalm 51:1-17—Pray this prayer of confession, allowing yourself to speak the words as your own. Let the words wash over you as you offer them up to the God who forgives and restores.

Carving God's Word in Your Heart

The Word of the Lord is priceless. Committing passages of Scripture to memory has benefited countless believers throughout the millennia. Jesus modeled this practice for us in his teaching ministry from beginning to end (see Matt. 4:1-11; 27:46; see also Ps. 22). Memorizing may seem difficult, but it can be done. Simply read and reread your verse often throughout the day, or write it down a number of times, or think of a way to put it to music. Let the words sink into your mind and heart, and they will become a part of you as the Spirit of God makes them meaningful to you. Here's a verse to memorize that connects with this lesson:

Memory Verse

Psalm 111:10: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise."

Write Your Own Psalm: Wisdom

A psalm is simply a prayer letter to God. Having studied about wisdom in this lesson, try your hand at writing your own wisdom psalm. Your psalm could include a truth you know about God, wisdom you have been given, and wisdom that you seek. Allow the Spirit to guide you in your writing. It doesn't have to be perfect—just from the heart—and it will be a beautiful offering to the Lord.

Praise God!

Is there a song of praise to God that lifts your spirit whenever you sing it? Sing or hum that song whenever you think of it during the day. You might even like to invite others to sing it with you. If someone doesn't know it, teach it to them. The apostle Paul says in Ephesians 5:18-20, "Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus

Christ.” For some suggestions, try *Psalms for All Seasons! A Complete Psalter for Worship* (Faith Alive, 2011, www.faithaliveresources.org), check out songbooks in a bookstore or online, or visit www.youtube.com and search “praise and worship” and “praise hymns.”

Break Away (at-home readings)

Taking Out the Trash

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

—Psalm 19:14

Have you ever said anything that you immediately wished you could take back? There was no wisdom in your words—only foolishness. I think everyone has had that experience. What comes out of our mouths is a direct result of what is on our minds. If we are thinking negatively, our words will be negative.

Jesus said in Luke 6:45: “A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.”

How can we store up good and wise things and purge, or clear out, the evil things from our hearts? Purging involves confessing. The only way to take out the trash is to agree that it is trash and needs to be taken out. We need to agree with God about the trash in our hearts and minds and that it needs to be gone. Don’t look at that website that tempts you to sin; fill your Internet time with learning and doing good things. Don’t listen to that degrading, nasty song; develop a taste in music that not only entertains but also helps you grow wiser and closer to God. Don’t do anything that will pour trash into your heart and mind. Instead be filled with things that are pleasing to God. Be filled with songs of praise to God, be filled with God’s Word, and be filled with doing good for God. While this does not guarantee a trouble-free life, it does help build our character as well as our relationship with God.





Ask God to help you identify areas in your life that need to be cleaned up, and then ask him to help you. Think about the benefits of doing so. (Cry out to God, if you have to. He can handle it.) Consider your reasons for wanting to hold on to things that are destructive or don't do you any good. What is the best choice?

Seeking Wisdom from God

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. —Psalm 139:23-24

I remember that when I was a teen, my bedroom always needed cleaning. There was always something more interesting to do than clean my room, so that was on the bottom of my priority list. However, if we had guests at the house, my mom would often show them around, and sometimes they would get a peek into my less than orderly bedroom. I would be horrified that my mother would show my room to others! I didn't want other people seeing my clothes strewn around, bed unmade, leftover snacks, and so on. My room held personal items of mine that were for my eyes only.

Thinking about inviting God into our hearts and minds can make us anxious. There may be unclean items strewn around that we think are for our eyes only. But God sees it all. And he loves us. God gives us the desire to live a life pleasing to him, and he promises to help us clean things up. We can't do it on our own anyway. We need his help. If we don't invite God in, that means we still want control and think our way is better. But God wants us to live the abundant life with him. It's for our good that we invite God in for renovation. It's wise to invite God in to lead our lives.

Is there anything in your life that needs cleaning up? If so, take a moment to commit to God whatever that thing is. Pray in a way like this: "Dear Lord, I have held on to _____ long enough. You have a better plan for me. I can trust you totally. Your wisdom is far above my own, and I want to seek you and your heart for my future steps in life. Thank you for loving me so much to care what is inside of me. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Is Purity Possible?

How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. —Psalm 119:9

Living a life of purity is possible. Some people do not believe that, but the Word of God says it is true. The difficult part of the promise is what is needed by us: obedience.

Helpful examples are available in the Christian community—both nearby and around the world. Lots of inspiring stories and testimonies are accessible on Internet websites such as www.GodTube.com and www.lamsecond.com.

Have you heard of the Christian rock group Barlow Girl? Part of their mission is to communicate to young women and men today that we can live wisely and purely in our world by obeying and honoring God's guidelines for everyday living. For example, in an interview at one of their concerts, the Barlow sisters (three daughters of recording artist Vince Barlow) talk about dating relationships and groups of friends that honor God without giving in to the world's ideas of premarital sex and other dating expectations or pitfalls. (At www.Godtube.com, search "story of purity.")

At www.lamsecond.com viewers can find testimonial videos about living for God and how God has changed people's lives. They often describe how making good choices, with God's help, has become a part of their everyday living.

Have you ever heard the lie that what we choose to do doesn't affect anyone else? Our choices never affect only ourselves. God wants us to make good choices. And God is always ready to help us. As our guide to live by, God's law is for our protection and for growing in wisdom. Being wise and living for the Lord is possible, and in God's strength we seek the wisdom of God each day. (See Phil. 4:8, 13.)

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life. . . . Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground. —Psalm 143:8-10





Queen Esther of Persia had a life-or-death choice to make (Esther 4). Her people, the Jews, were being threatened with annihilation. Their archenemy, Haman, had manipulated the king into making a decree to kill all the Jews in his vast Persian Empire (around 480 B.C.). Esther herself was a Jew, but the king and Haman didn't know that. She knew she had to plead for the lives of her people and herself, but the king hadn't called for her to see him in the past thirty days. That meant she had another problem: if she approached the king without being summoned, she could be killed if the king didn't hold out his scepter to welcome her.

Esther knew that the right thing to do was to plead for her people, God's people. So she gathered up her courage and asked all the Jews in the capital city, Susa, to fast and pray while she and her attendants also fasted for three days. (Fasting is an ancient religious practice in which people go without food and/or water for set periods of time; for the Jews this included praying to God for help in a time of great need.) "When this is done," Esther said, "I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16).

What do you do when you feel caught "between a rock and a hard place"?

When you have faced a tough choice, have you asked God for help or wisdom? James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." Psalm 111:10 adds, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding."

Is there anything in your life that calls for wisdom right now? Ask God for help. The Lord loves to give us wisdom. God cares for us and wants us to live wisely, doing what's right by honoring the Lord and showing his love to others.

(To find how things worked out for Esther, see Esther 5-7 in the Bible.)

Wisdom in Letting Go

The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid? —Psalm 27:1

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way. . . .

—Psalm 46:1-2

The dreaded phone call arrived—the biopsy showed cancer. How could this be? It was hard to believe because I felt perfectly fine. I was so busy in my work, which was always focused on God, and I wondered if God couldn't see that.

My life was about to change in major ways. Was I prepared? Was God preparing me for this? I looked back on a time when I took care of my grandmother who had cancer. I learned so much about it then.

A few people who didn't know about the diagnosis called me to say that God had put it on their hearts to pray for me. It was obvious that God was at work. The Lord hadn't left me, but was showing me love in a new and deeper way. My trust in God grew more than I could imagine during that difficult time.

I learned that the hardest choice I had to make was to let go of my own sense of control and admit that God had to take over. I surrendered my life to God to do with it whatever he desired for his purposes. Amazing things happened. I was prayed for by people around the world. My surgery was successful. My treatments went very well. I developed a whole new network of people touched by cancer. I received blessing after blessing— and yet there were days when I wasn't really appreciative. On those days I learned a lot about God's mercy and grace. There were days when fear took over, and I didn't choose to rejoice in the day the Lord had made for me. I am sure I missed a lot of good opportunities for Jesus to shine through me, but God's love continues to flow and helps me to grow and do whatever I'm called to do.

Think of a situation in your life in which your fear took over in you. How did you feel during that time? What were your responses? What choices did you make? How might it have been different if you applied God's wisdom to the situation?

In all situations, ask God to calm and protect you, and to help you let go of any fears and anxieties so that you can find refuge and rest in him.



The book of Psalms is a tapestry of thought-provoking prayers, songs of joy and praise and lament, wisdom, prophecy, history, and beautiful poetry. As they point us to the Lord, our Rock and Redeemer, these prayer letters to God help us understand the human condition and what God can accomplish for us and through us.

As we look into psalms of wisdom, lament, trust, grace and mercy, thanksgiving, kingship, and praise, we'll grow to know God more, discern true wisdom, and rise to new levels of worship and praise.



Infuse Bible Studies aim to help people discover where faith and life meet. With these studies you can engage in lively discussion and learning without having studied the Bible before doing each lesson, and you can use these effectively for small group or personal study.

The approach to Bible study in this series emphasizes discovery (the reader discovers what the Bible has to say by asking questions and seeking answers from the passage studied). Additional insights from history and other sources help to fill in details that connect this story to the larger story of God's love and care for us all.

We hope this study stirs your heart to fully know God and the abundant life the Lord intends for us.