

DEVOTION // IN THE PSALMS

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BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

In the Bible, God reveals His truth about how to have eternal life by becoming a believer in the finished work of Jesus Christ. The believer is a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, a true child of God, and one who has been saved by God according to God's grace (undeserved favor). "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

How does one become a Christian?

- The Bible, God's word, says that eternal life (salvation) is a free gift of God which cannot be earned or deserved (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9).
- However, we also find in God's word that all people are born sinners and cannot save themselves from the penalty of sin, which is eternal death and separation from God. God's requirement is perfection and no one is perfect (Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:3-23; Ephesians 2:1-4).
- God tells us in His word that He is holy, meaning that He is perfect and that He is also just, meaning that He gives to sinners what is deserved, and because of His holiness and justice He must punish sinners. But thankfully, the Bible also says that God is loving and merciful and does not take pleasure in punishing sinners (Exodus 34:6-7; Ephesians 2:4-5).
- God has mercy on sinners by not giving them what they deserve. This is only possible because He gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, the God-man, to be the substitute for sinners bearing the penalty for their sin and satisfying God's justice (John 1:1,14; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 5:8).
- Jesus said that in order for anyone to have eternal life there must be repentance of sins and faith placed in His substitutionary death on the cross to pay for the penalty of one's sins. This faith must be in Jesus Christ alone, not depending on anything else including "good works" (Mark 1:15b; Acts 20:21; Ephesians 2:8-9).

What then is the response to these things if one desires to have eternal life and become a Christian?

1. Pray and ask God to forgive you. The Bible says that you must repent of your sins, being ashamed of them, genuinely regretting and grieving over them, and firmly deciding to make an about-face and turn away from sin and your old lifestyle (Acts 3:19-20).
2. Pray and tell God that you place your faith in Jesus Christ alone to save you. The Bible says that for you to become a Christian, you must place your faith and trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ who died on the cross to become your substitute and who took the penalty for your sin upon Himself once and for all (John 3:36).

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DEVOTION IN THE PSALMS

April 24, 2022 | *Recognizing the Signs to Praise God*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

What keeps you from recognizing God's glory?

Read Psalm 147.

Pray that this lesson would open your eyes concerning the praise God is due.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

We need to pay attention to all the signs pointing us to praise God.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Our sin keeps us from recognizing the signs that point us to praise God.

MEDITATE

"He covers the heavens with clouds; he prepares rain for the earth; he makes grass grow on the hills"

(Psalm 147:8).

GETTING STARTED

+This section introduces the key theme and application question of this lesson.

Q: *Have you ever been unable to see something extraordinary because of bad weather conditions or some other obstruction?*

Q: *Why is it hard to recognize people you have not seen for a long time?*

While I was dating my future wife, she invited me to go to the North Carolina mountains with her family. Her family rented a cabin every fall and spent several days hiking and observing the beautiful fall foliage. They also spent a day driving along the Blue Ridge Parkway. The parkway stretches for hundreds of miles across North Carolina and Virginia. There are about 280 pull-offs along the way that offer incredible views of the Piedmont area below. The first year with my wife's family was extremely foggy. We decided to still take the drive on the parkway, but the fog limited the views. At almost every stop, my wife explained how beautiful the view from the overlook was, but I could not appreciate it. In the years since, I've been able to take in the beautiful views my wife described to me, but during that first year, I failed to recognize the glory of what I could not see.

In Psalm 147, the psalmist was pleading with his audience to recognize the glory of God on display all around them. The problem, however, was that their view of God's glory was often obstructed. Like I could not appreciate the beauty of the Blue Ridge Parkway, they could not appreciate the glory all around them.

Q: *What are the perils of failing to see God's glory?*

Q: *Why is the world unconcerned with seeing God's glory?*

APPLICATION POINT – The psalmist wants to show us the glory of God all around us, but for a variety of reasons, we struggle to see it. One reason we fail to see God's glory is simply restricted vision. Like me on the overlooks that foggy day, we cannot appreciate what we cannot see. And we fail to put the things we do see into the perspective needed to appreciate who God is and what He has done. Psalm 147 encourages us to reevaluate things we have overlooked or taken for granted. The psalmist seeks to roll away the fog so we can behold God's glory in full.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Psalm 147 is found in the middle of a series of praise psalms concluding the Psalter (Psalms 145–150). They conclude Israel’s book of praise by doing just that: praising the eternal God. Psalm 147 can be divided into three sections, each beginning with an invocation to praise. Although we cannot see it in English, each section begins with a different Hebrew word relating to singing or praise. We can praise God in a variety of ways.

1. RECOGNIZE WHAT GOD HAS DONE.
2. RECOGNIZE WHY GOD HAS DONE IT.
3. RECOGNIZE WHAT GOD HAS COMMUNICATED.

GOING DEEPER

+Each section of Psalm 147 encourages us to recognize God’s glory in a different way. This section will investigate what the psalmist had to say and then ask what keeps us from appreciating God’s glory in the manner he described.

1. RECOGNIZE WHAT GOD HAS DONE

■ PSALM 147:1–6

🔍: *How does the context provided by verse 2 help us understand verse 1?*

🔍: *Why were the people brokenhearted?*

Psalm 147 begins with a declaration of how it is good to praise the Lord. At first, this may seem as though the psalmist was acknowledging the intrinsic value of praising God. It is good to praise God for no other reason than that He is God. This is true, of course, but it is not the psalmist’s intent. Verse 1 occurs within the context of the return from exile. Thus, there is a somber note to the psalmist’s words. There was a time when praising God was

difficult. When the Babylonians swept through the holy city and desecrated the temple, it was difficult to praise God. As Israel languished in exile for seventy years, it was difficult to praise God. But now, God had moved in Israel's favor. He had gathered the Israelites from exile and rebuilt Jerusalem. He healed the people's wounds and broken hearts. God was doing a good work in Israel again, and the psalmist was recognizing the goodness of praising God again.

❓: *What would keep you from praising God after accepting Christ as Savior?*

❓: *How can Christians maintain their joy in God regardless of circumstances?*

APPLICATION POINT – God was doing an amazing thing in Israel. The return from Babylon is often regarded as a new exodus moment for the people of God. They were in captivity and broken. He brought them out of captivity and healed their wounds. The exodus and the return from Babylon are pictures of what God has done for us. Before Jesus, we were held captive by our sins. In Christ, we have been freed from sin and brought back into fellowship with God. We have been delivered from Egypt. We have been brought back from exile. The psalmist wanted the people of God to recognize what He had done for them and respond in praise. We also must recognize what God has done and respond in praise.

❓: *How does Isaiah 40:26 help us understand Psalm 147:4-5?*

❓: *How would you describe what happens in verse 6?*

The psalmist declared that God controls the stars and even names them. Isaiah used similar language (Isaiah 40:26) to describe the greatness and power of God. As Isaiah looked into the night sky, he saw that every star was in its place. None was missing because God sustained their patterns and movement. This helped Isaiah acknowledge God as everlasting. The psalmist intended to make this same connection. For the psalmist, God's control was evident not only from the cosmos but also from the patterns of nature. In verses 16–18, the psalmist described the coming of snow and ice, which melt to make the waters flow. He was describing the seasons of the earth. Snow and ice come in winter, but in the spring, the land thaws, the snow melts, and the rivers fill with flowing water. Just as God reigns over the cosmos, He also reigns over the earth.

Given God's involvement in holding the universe together and moving the earth from one season to another, we should not be surprised to learn He is also capable of reversing the fortunes of humanity. God will raise up the humble who trust in Him, but He will bring the wicked down in judgment.

❓: *Is anything truly random in the world?*

❓: *Why do people fail to recognize the glory of God in the cosmos?*

APPLICATION POINT – A deist is a person who believes in God but doubts that He maintains any significant role in the workings of humanity or even in the world He created. They are skeptical of the Christian belief that God is personally involved with His creation, much less individuals. Their argument often points to the vastness and complexity of the universe, and they claim that our affairs here on earth are simply too small to matter. The psalmist agreed that God rules over the cosmos, but he equally believed in God's personal involvement in human affairs. Perhaps one reason we do not recognize the need for praising God is that we place limits on Him. As with the deist, we mistakenly think our struggles, our pain, or our dilemmas are too trifling for God to be concerned with. The psalmist calls us to recognize the degree to which God is involved in His creation and our lives.

2. RECOGNIZING WHY GOD HAS DONE IT

■ PSALM 147:7-11

❓: *After considering the cosmos, what did the psalmist turn his attention to?*

❓: *How would you describe God's activities in verses 8-9?*

After signaling another call to give God the praise He is due, the psalmist turned his attention from the cosmos to earthly matters. God sustains the natural order through His power. He oversees weather patterns and botanical processes. He maintains the animals by providing their food. Though not mentioned by the psalmist, it is intriguing to consider his portrayal of Israel's God compared to how other nations portrayed their gods. Other gods in the ancient Near East were typically associated with a single part of creation. The Canaanites believed that their god Baal, referred to numerous times in the Old Testament, was the god of weather or lightening. The goddess Ashura was in charge of fertility. There was no place for this division of duties in the psalmist's mind. He recognized one God who reigned over every aspect of His creation. Nothing is beyond His control. Nothing passes without His notice.

❓: *Why do we fail to recognize God's glory in the patterns of nature?*

❓: *Why should we be thankful that God rules over every aspect of His creation?*

APPLICATION POINT – The scientific revolution has provided a greater understanding of our world and everything in it. Not only do we have a more sophisticated understanding of the world than previous generations, we are also able to manipulate many of the natural process of the world to our advantage. We should be thankful for these advances in our knowledge. Our lives are easier and healthier today because of scientific discovery and engineering. We should not, however, disregard God's continued oversight of His creation. Our knowledge of photosynthesis or the water cycle does not mean these processes would continue apart from His oversight. In fact, the intricacies of these processes and the rest of the natural order should help us recognize God's glory and our duty to praise Him.

❓: *Is God displeased with horses and humanity?*

❓: *What would be the opposite of fearing God and hoping in His steadfast love?*

Given God's majesty evident in the world around us, it is natural for humanity to question how God may be pleased. The psalmist anticipated this question and quickly dispelled the line of thinking most people would follow. God is not impressed by expensive gifts or feats of strength. Humanity will never succeed in pleasing God that way. God is not displeased with the horse He created or with humanity. But the God who sets the earth in

motion and sustains it at every step along the way cannot be impressed with our strength. Instead, He is pleased with those who recognize His glory and hope in His ability to sustain what He has made. He is pleased when His subjects recognize His glory.

Q: *Why do we look within ourselves for a way to please the God who created us?*

Q: *How is the tendency to look within for answers similar to Genesis 3:4-6?*

APPLICATION POINT – The most basic reason we fail to recognize God’s glory is due to sin in our own lives. Like Adam and Eve, we mistakenly believe that the answer to what is good lies within us. We want to be the arbiter of what is good and beautiful. In doing so, we reject what God has said is good and beautiful. We attempt to usurp God’s role. As long as we try to do this, we will never be able to recognize God’s glory. Even committed Christians can fall into this trap when we become wrapped up in our pride and our desires.

3. RECOGNIZE WHAT GOD HAS COMMUNICATED

■ PSALM 147:12–20

Q: *Why would a nation returning from exile rejoice in the message of verses 13-15?*

Q: *What is God’s command that runs swiftly through the earth?*

Following his final petition to praise God, the psalmist highlighted a list of blessings God could provide a struggling nation returning from exile. God strengthens the bars of the gates once torn down by oppressors. He blesses children. He protects the nation from foreign invaders. Finally, He provides food to help them avoid famine. The finest wheat is a sign of God’s covenantal blessing (Deuteronomy 32:14). If Israel would recognize God’s glory, they would never need to fear the trials of exile again. God was able to protect their nation.

Q: *Was the psalmist suggesting we place our hope in peace and security?*

Q: *What keeps us from trusting God for our security?*

APPLICATION POINT –The psalmist identified God as Israel’s protector. Our tendency, however, is often to place our confidence in other things for our protection. I had an uncle who owned an arsenal that would have made many small countries jealous. I would not have been surprised if the National Guard stopped by his house if they ever needed to go into combat. One time I asked him why he needed so many guns if he only had two hands. He thought I was serious and laid out how every weapon could be utilized during a home invasion. He had a lot of confidence in his weaponry to protect him. I attended a small group for several months that was led by a financial advisor. One time he shared his retirement plan with me. I lost track of how many IRAs and stock options he had lined up. He had one plan for high inflation and another for if the stock market crashed. He had yet another in case he or his wife ever fell ill and needed maximum medical care. My uncle died of cancer in the hospital. My investor friend died of a heart attack about a year into his retirement. I would never discourage people from investing in home protection or planning for the future, but their stories illustrate that we cannot protect ourselves from everything, no matter how good our plans are. We need to trust in God’s protection. If we fail to find our security in Him, we will never see His glory.

Q: *How does God’s Word help us recognize His glory?*

Q: *What was the word God declared to Jacob [Israel]?*

The psalmist concluded by acknowledging the special revelation God had given to Israel. Just as His word directs the seasons (verse 18), His Word must also direct His people. The psalmist had at least the Torah (first five books of the Bible) in mind, and he may even have been aware of a substantial portion of the rest of the Old Testament. The psalmist viewed God’s Word as a gift to Israel. No other nation had been given such a privileged opportunity, but this opportunity came with responsibility. It was not enough for Israel to possess God’s words. They must also live by them if they were to see how they revealed God’s glory.

Q: *Is your relationship with God's Word strong enough to help you recognize His glory?*

Q: *In what ways can you improve your intake of God's Word?*

APPLICATION POINT –The psalmist's final remarks are a good opportunity to examine your intake of God's Word. The goal of exposing yourself to the Bible is to help you recognize God's glory. Oakwood's emphasis on your personal devotional times has hopefully encouraged you to start a regular practice of reading God's Word and applying the insights you discover. Make sure you are also identifying certain portions of the Bible that may be helpful for you to memorize. We are uneven creatures. We often start good habits only to compromise or fall away from them after a time. God's Word is a gift to us. Make sure you are embracing it and using it to recognize His glory.

NEXT STEPS

This lesson has highlighted the different ways in which God has revealed His glory to us. It has also questioned what keeps us from seeing God's glory through all the means He has laid out. Chose one of these elements and make a concerted effort to see God's glory with it this week. If you struggle to see God's glory through the inner workings of nature and His sustaining role within it, consider taking a nature walk, perhaps early in the morning, and pray for God to reveal His glory to you. If you struggle with trusting God's provision in your life, make a plan, like you would a financial plan or security plan, to help you trust in Him more. If you have found yourself unable to rejoice in the salvation God has provided you, perhaps take some time to sing praises to God in private this week. Take the steps you need to recognize God's glory. Your joy as a follower of Jesus rests in Him.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

-Father, I seek to recognize your glory during every moment of my life. Help me to embrace every means of doing so and cast aside everything that would hinder me.

-Jesus, I have a great salvation centered on the work you accomplished for me. Help me to bask in the glory of God as I reflect upon what you have done.

-Father, you are my protector. Forgive me for the ways I have failed to trust in your provision.

-God, your Word is a gift given to me to help me recognize who you are and what you have done for me. Help me to never neglect Your life-giving Word.

DEVOTION IN THE PSALMS

May 1, 2022 | Seeking forgiveness, finding God

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

What is the difference between repentance and regret?

Read Psalm 51.

Ask God to guide you into appropriate repentance.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

God receives those who turn to Him in repentance.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Repentance is the only right response to sin.

MEDITATE

*“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise”
(Psalm 51:17).*

GETTING STARTED

+This section introduces the lesson by drawing attention to how seeking forgiveness from God differs from seeking forgiveness from others.

Q: *What are some situations in which people act differently because of who is involved?*

Q: *Is it right to change your behavior based on who is around?*

While I was in seminary, one of my favorite weeks each semester was trustee week when all the seminary's trustees came to campus to conduct their semi-annual business. What I appreciated about that week was that everyone made the extra effort to ensure that everything looked pristine and worked smoothly. The lawn crew ensured the campus looked beautiful. The cleaning crew made every hallway and classroom sparkle. The maintenance crew made sure everything on campus worked properly. The food court served their best meals. The IT department was fully available for addressing technical glitches. Someone of notoriety was usually invited to speak during chapel. All of these entities did a terrific job throughout the year, but because of who was in town, they all made an extra effort to ensure that everything was special during trustee weeks.

Things changed on campus because of the presence of the trustees. The presence of certain individuals changes the way we do things. You could imagine a similar situation occurring for a presidential visit, a visit from the Queen, or if some other celebrity were to visit your community. Things would be different because of who was involved. We see something similar in Psalm 51. The psalmist had been caught in a grievous wrong and was seeking forgiveness from God, but he knew that seeking forgiveness from God is not like trying to make amends with others you have wronged. God's presence in the situation changed everything about his sin and how he must seek forgiveness. It is not as though the psalmist would not have been brokenhearted in addressing others impacted by his actions, but the reality of God and His holiness overshadowed everything about this psalm.

Q: *What things do people typically say when they apologize?*

Q: *Do you address your sins with God in the same way you would with a family member or coworker?*

APPLICATION POINT – We have all, at some time, offended others and needed to seek forgiveness. There are certain cultural patterns we usually follow in how we do this. Some of these habits are helpful. For example, we

may give reassurances that we will never behave in such an objectionable manner again, or we may offer some kind of restitution. Other habits are not so helpful, such as when we question whether our actions should have caused such an offense. When we need to address our sins with God, however, all of our tendencies in seeking forgiveness need to be reexamined in light of God's holiness. The psalmist's prayer exemplifies how God's holiness changes everything in how we approach Him for forgiveness of our sin.

▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Each of the headings below, except the first, identifies a tendency we or others may have when addressing wrongs with others. In each section, we will see how the psalmist avoided these tendencies because he recognized that God's holiness changes things.

1. WHAT ABOUT THESE SUPERSCRPTIONS?
2. THEY DENY THE SEVERITY.
3. THEY WANT TO RECONCILE SIN THEMSELVES.
4. THEY DENY SIN IS A PART OF WHO THEY ARE.
5. THEY COMMIT TO DOING BETTER NEXT TIME.
6. THEY BRING OTHERS DOWN WITH THEM.

GOING DEEPER

+Psalm 51 is one of the seven penitential psalms. These psalms express deep lamentation for personal sin and seek forgiveness from God. They demonstrate for us how fallen sinners can confess their sins before a holy and righteous God.

1. WHAT ABOUT THESE SUPERSCRPTIONS?

OBSERVE – 116 of 150 psalms contain a superscription, that is, an introduction, instruction, direction, etc., given before the Scriptural passage.

Q: *What kind of information have you noted in the superscriptions?*

Q: *Why are the superscriptions important?*

The first thing you will notice as you read Psalm 51 is a lengthy superscription at the outset. As you have read the psalms during your personal Bible reading and for this series, you have undoubtedly encountered superscriptions at the beginning of many other psalms. This is a unique element of the Psalter and creates a variety of difficulties and possibilities to aid us in the interpretation of the psalms. Of the 150 psalms, 116 begin with a superscription. They vary in length and in the significance of the information included but frequently identify the psalm's genre and its authors. Some superscriptions, as with Psalm 51, allude to the historical situation in which the psalm was composed.

It is curious to see how people respond to the superscriptions. Many scholars are inclined to negate the significance of the superscriptions. They frequently argue that they were added long after the psalms to which they were attached were written. I'm always curious to see when people read from Psalms during a worship service if they will read the superscription as well. I've noticed a trend towards omitting them. Ignoring the superscriptions, however, is unwise in my opinion because they are included in every ancient manuscript we have of Psalms. To put the matter simply, we do not know of the psalms apart from these superscriptions. There is no more warrant for ignoring them than there would be for ignoring anything else in the Bible. Furthermore, there is plenty of evidence suggesting the ancient Jews treated the superscriptions as part of the inspired text of Psalms. For example, Jesus relied on the superscription of Psalm 110 to identify David as the author (Matthew 22:43–44). The information provided by the superscription is a vital part of what Jesus had to say, and He treated it on the same level as the rest of the psalm.

Q: *How should we use the information in the superscriptions to interpret the psalms?*

Q: *Do the psalms typically allude to specific or generic events?*

APPLICATION POINT – The psalms have been written in a generic style. They typically avoid alluding to specific historical circumstances to make it easier for the readers to apply them to whatever situation they are confronted

with. Superscriptions identifying the historical circumstances under which a psalm was composed may seem to work against this tendency, but this does not need to be the case. The historical background merely becomes the first example of how the words of the psalm can be applied in real life. For Psalm 51, the superscription identifies David's sin against Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11–12) as the historical context. This gives us a specific example of how to apply the words of this psalm, but the psalm's message extends beyond this event. We can use Psalm 51 any time we need to seek God in repentance. Superscriptions like this do not limit the meaning of the psalm but demonstrate how the psalm can be used.

Remember the remaining points show the tendency sinners may have when addressing their sins rather than what the psalmist did in addressing his sins.

2. THEY DENY THE SEVERITY OF THEIR SIN.

■ PSALM 51:4

Q: *Why did David say he had sinned only against God when his actions also affected Bathsheba and Uriah?*

Q: *How did David's sin affect Bathsheba and Uriah differently than it did God?*

In Psalm 51:4, David made a confession that is challenging for us to understand given the historical backdrop provided by the superscription. He claimed to have sinned against God alone, but this confession hardly seems to appreciate the extent of what he did. David slept with Uriah's wife and then had him killed to cover his tracks. He certainly wronged both of them. Furthermore, his actions can easily be seen as a wrong against the entire community. This kind of behavior tears communities apart, destabilizes families, and perverts justice within the community. David's sin had far-reaching implications, yet he said his sin was committed against God only.

The key to understanding what David said is understanding how he was using the word sin. Sin can be used in such a way as to make it basically synonymous with the word "wrong." When Scripture speaks of sinning against others or ourselves (Matthew 18:15–17; 1 Corinthians 6:18), this is a generic use of the word. In this sense, David certainly sinned against Uriah, Bathsheba, and the whole community. But the word sin can also be defined in a more rigorously theological way. In this sense, we understand sin as a rebellion against God. It is a challenge to God's deity and a refusal to submit to His will. Understood this way, we can see why sin can only be committed against God. No matter how badly we wrong others, our actions against them are not a rebellion against them

because they have no ultimate authority over us. Nor can the wrongs we commit against others be understood as a refusal to submit to their will. We are not obligated to submit to the will of others. Thus, David was acknowledging the full theological horror of what he had done. His actions were a challenge to God's holiness, His justice, and His dominion.

Q: *In what ways do people deny the nature of their sins?*

Q: *Why do we fail to consider how our sins impact God?*

APPLICATION POINT – The theological definition of sin helps us to get to the heart of the matter. Sin is rebellion against God. It is an attempt to dethrone Him and leave Him in the wake with everyone else we've walked over to get our own way. Christians, even mature believers, sometimes tend to make light of certain sins. It is almost as if we believe that God doesn't really care about things He has clearly revealed to be sinful in His Word. Such a mindset fails to appreciate the nature of sin, the extent of our depravity, and the holiness of our God. If we recognize all sin as a denial of God's reign over us, as David does in Psalm 51, we would never disregard even the most banal sins in our lives. We would hate every instance of sin with an intense fervor that could only be matched by our equal love for God.

3. THEY WANT TO RECONCILE SIN THEMSELVES.

■ PSALM 51:1-2, 7

Q: *What did the psalmist appeal to when he asked God to forget his sin?*

Q: *How did the psalmist ask to be cleansed from his sin?*

The psalmist openly acknowledged his sin and recognized that his only hope resided in God alone. He desired for God to accomplish two things for him. He yearned for God, in His great mercy, to take away his sin. He made this request with an appeal to God's steadfast love that moves Him to maintain a relationship with us even though

we have utterly failed to reciprocate this same kind of commitment to Him. God's steadfast love finds its greatest expression in the death of Jesus on our behalf. In light of His steadfast love, the psalmist appealed to God to blot out his transgression, meaning to purge the record of the wrong committed. The psalmist also desired for God to cleanse him from his sin. The washing and cleansing imagery draws upon the cleansing rituals found throughout the book of Leviticus. The purging with hyssop image stems from the cleansing of leprosy (Leviticus 14). The psalmist wished for every aspect of his sin to be undone.

Q: *How do we address the wrongs we commit against others?*

Q: *Why will our normal tactics for addressing our shortcoming fail miserably with God?*

APPLICATION POINT – It is commendable when we seek to provide restitution for the wrongs we have done. It presumes ownership of the wrongs we have done, recognition of the harm we have caused, and intent to set things right as much as we are able. If my negligence causes a colleague to miss a deadline at work, the right thing to do is to make sure everyone involved understands it was my error that caused the problem. If I run late to a meeting, the right thing to do is to take measures that will keep me from being late in the future. Since this is considered commendable behavior when we wrong others, we also feel this kind of urge when we sin against God. We want to regain His trust by doing something to win His favor. We might give a little extra to the offering or make an extra effort to attend a worship service we would normally skip. While seeking to make restitution is admirable when we wrong others, we have to realize the utter impossibility of our making restitution for sin. Since our sin offends an eternally holy God, there is nothing we can ever do to reconcile our own actions. Our best efforts will fall eternally short of what God is due. The only way we will find restitution for our sins is if God provides it, and He has in Jesus. Jesus, who in every way exemplifies God's steadfast love, has accomplished on our behalf what we could never accomplish on our own. Our sins are not blotted out but are written to His account. In Him, God declares us not guilty of sin. No restitution is required on our part.

4. THEY DENY THAT SIN IS A PART OF WHO THEY ARE.

PSALM 51:5

Q: *What did the psalmist mean when he said he was brought forth in iniquity?*

Q: *How did the psalmist's mother sin in conceiving him?*

Psalm 51:5 could easily be misunderstood by modern readers. The psalmist was not suggesting that his mother sinned in any way in the act of conceiving him. She was not acting promiscuously. Instead, when the psalmist said he was conceived with sin and was sinful from birth, he was referring to what theologians call original or inherited sin. This is the belief, based mainly on Romans 5, that all humanity is considered guilty because of Adam's sin. While theologians sometimes disagree on the technical aspects of the doctrine of inherited sin, the overall message of Romans 5 supports what the psalmist alluded to in Psalm 51:5. He was sinful from the moment of his conception. He was sinful just because he was born as a part of Adam's posterity. His legal standing before God did not change when he committed the sin referred to in this psalm or when he committed any other sin. He was born guilty, and the sin on this occasion is merely an outworking of the sinful nature he possessed from the moment he was conceived.

Q: *When people act in a wrongful or hurtful manner, why do they want to deny that their actions are truly representative of their character?*

Q: *What have we inherited from Jesus that corresponds to the guilt we inherit from Adam?*

APPLICATION POINT – “That’s just not who I am.” We seem to hear this phrase more and more these days, especially when a celebrity or CEO issues an apology for some kind of wrong behavior. When we wrong others, we desperately want to believe that our actions were outside of our true character and therefore just an isolated incident. The psalmist knew better. While he was deeply ashamed of his actions, he knew that sin was an undeniable part of who he was. He was a guilty sinner at birth, and life had simply revealed that to be the case.

The same is true for us. As part of Adam's fallen race, we are guilty sinners. We sin against God and wrong others because that is who we are. We cannot save face by trying to act as though what we have done is an anomaly and that we really are morally superior to what our actions indicated. The good news for us is that even though we are inherently sinful, if we confess Christ as our Savior, Adam's sin does not have the last word. Just as we inherited

the guilt from Adam's sin, when we find ourselves in Christ, we inherit the righteousness that is intrinsic to Him. Although we are guilty of sin, in Christ, God declares us not guilty. If you are offended by the doctrine of inherited sin, you need to realize that those in Christ are the winners in this equation. While we inherit the guilt of sin we did not commit, we inevitably verify that verdict with sin of our own. In the righteousness we inherit from Christ, we receive something we could never achieve on our own.

5. THEY COMMIT TO DOING BETTER NEXT TIME.

■ PSALM 51:10

Q: *What was the psalmist's plan for keeping himself from sin in the future?*

Q: *How is Psalm 51:10 related to Jeremiah 31:33?*

The psalmist longed to never sin again. He asked God to create a new heart in him that would be guarded against sin. The word “create” in this request has a deeper underlying significance than we could guess when reading this psalm in English. It is the same verb used when God created the world (Genesis 1:1). In the Old Testament, this verb is only used when God is the subject. The psalmist was asking God to do something only He could do. Only God could give him a heart that will not be predisposed toward sin. The psalmist could not create a new heart for himself. In the same way, Jeremiah anticipated a day when God would create new hearts for all His people (Jeremiah 31:31–40). Jeremiah was addressing a group of exiles. They were removed from the promised land because of their sin, but God had committed to bring them back from exile. He would do so by first giving them new hearts that were untainted by the effects of sin. Only God is able to accomplish this.

Q: *Why is it pointless for us to decide to do better next time?*

Q: *Why do people think they can change a sinful heart by their own willpower?*

APPLICATION POINT – One of the reassurances we give others and ourselves when we mess up is “I’ll do better next time.” The psalmist’s words reveal how doomed we are to fail when we try to get rid of sin through our own willpower. It does not matter how much we are convinced of the heinousness of sin, apart from God creating a new heart within us, we will never be able to avoid the pull of sin. Freeing us from the bondage of sin is something God must accomplish for us. We can never do it by our own efforts, no matter how many times we say we will do better next time.

6. THEY BRING OTHERS DOWN WITH THEM.

❏ PSALM 51:18–19

Q: *Who did the psalmist pray for in the final two verses?*

Q: *Why did the psalmist include others in his prayer of repentance?*

In a curious twist, the psalmist concluded this psalm by praying for his city. The entire psalm to this point has focused on an instance of personal sin. He has repented and sought reconciliation with God. Why did he introduce this communal element at the close of this psalm? One conclusion we can draw is that while he knew his sin was personal, he also recognized that the effects of his sin extended beyond him to his community. When one person is trapped in sin, everybody loses. Therefore, the last step he took was to intercede on behalf of his community. When this psalm was written, Jerusalem and Zion could have been viewed as almost synonymous. Zion refers specifically to the mountain in Jerusalem where the temple would be located. Jerusalem would have included Mount Zion and the surrounding areas. It is possible that in mentioning Zion the psalmist could be emphasizing the city’s worship, and in mentioning Jerusalem he intended to emphasize the city’s political sphere.

Q: *Why does misery love company?*

Q: *Have you ever tried to condemn others when you have been caught in a wrong?*

APPLICATION POINT – Sometimes when people are caught in blatant wrongdoing, they seek to bring others down with them. Perhaps they see it as advantageous to do so. Perhaps they simply want the satisfaction of knowing others are falling alongside of them. Whatever the case, notice that the psalmist sought to do the exact opposite. He did not want the pain of this sin to carry over into the community around him. He would spare his community as much as possible and seek its prosperity even while he faced condemnation. Such an outlook reveals an acceptance of the sin he had committed and a willingness to place the wellbeing of others ahead of himself. A healthy concern for those around you is a sign that you understand sin for the horror it is and are ready for you and others to escape its condemnation.

NEXT STEPS

While the psalmist was undoubtedly confessing sin and seeking reconciliation with God, Psalm 51 at times oscillates between contrition and praise. He wanted to draw attention to his sin and the pain it has caused, but he could not help but praise God as he anticipated reconciliation with Him. We never want to make light of sin, but we also never want to become so overcome with guilt that we cannot see the glory of God. Confession and repentance are meant to lead to praise. Identify a particular sin you struggle with and follow the cycle of this psalm all the way through to praise. When we see the glory of God, we have what we need to flee from sin.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week. In many ways, the entire psalm is meant to be voiced as a prayer of those seeking reconciliation.

-Father, my sin is a rebellion against you. Forgive me for ever making light of sin.

-Lord Jesus, you are the perfect demonstration of the Father's steadfast love even for sinners. Thank you for all the ways you demonstrate the Father's love for me.

-God, I need a new heart. You are the only hope I have of escaping the condemning influence of sin.

-Father, help those around me to prosper even though I am wrapped up in sin. May I never distract anyone from your glory.



DEVOTION IN THE PSALMS

May 8, 2022 | *The Joy of Embracing Forgiveness*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Would you rather forgive someone else or receive forgiveness?

Read Psalm 32.

Pray this lesson will highlight your destructive tendencies regarding sin and forgiveness.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

There is more joy to be found in repentance than in persisting in sin.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Repent from sin instead of rebelling against God.

MEDITATE

“Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord” (Psalm 32:10).

GETTING STARTED

+This section illustrates one of the main themes of this passage by discussing destructive behavioral patterns in which people become caught.

Q: *What are some self-destructive habits you find yourself in?*

Q: *Why is it hard to change our behavior even when we know we would be better off for it?*

We are often our own worst enemies. Psychologists have observed that many of people's most destructive behavior patterns are cyclical. We tend to repeat the same patterns until we completely self-destruct. A self-destructive pattern I struggled with in college was procrastination. Procrastination, at least in my case, usually began with a false sense of security. Due dates seemed far away, and I was certain I could complete the task quickly. As deadlines approached, I continued to make excuses for putting off assignments. Once I finally decided to begin working, I struggled with distractions. As the due date drew nearer, I panicked. I dealt with this panic by creating some distance between myself and the assignment by not working on it, which, of course, only made the situation worse. Finally, at the very last minute, I worked through the night and pulled together everything I could. The quality of my work suffered greatly. I could not provide the necessary attention to detail because I did not give myself time to do so.

My self-destructive procrastination habit is just one example of destructive behavioral patterns people find themselves trapped in. While my procrastination struggles led to a lot of needless consternation, the long-term effects were hardly detrimental. Others are not so fortunate. Some people struggle with patterns that cause them to be the perpetrators or victims of physical abuse. Others fall into cyclical patterns of drug or alcohol addiction. In Psalm 32, the psalmist seemed familiar with these kinds of self-destructive behaviors. He did not divulge the specifics, but he saw a cyclical pattern of sin in his life. While he knew forgiveness was always found in God's mercy, he tried to suppress the reality of his sin. Doing so led to an inner turmoil he could not escape. Although he saw the way out from the beginning, he seemed bent on causing himself undue pain before turning to repentance. Once he looked for repentance, he found that God's mercy brings greater joy than he ever dreamed.

Q: *Why are sinful patterns impossible for us to break alone?*

Q: *Why are psychology and prescriptions never enough to cure sin?*

APPLICATION POINT – One thing that distinguishes the psalmist’s struggle from other self-destructive behaviors is the theological dimension. The psalmist knew his actions offended God, and he eventually sought God’s forgiveness and reconciliation. We would never want to deny the reality of psychological and physical factors that drive people’s behavior, but Christians must also acknowledge the reality that sin is the root of every self-destructive cycle we face. Since sin is always the root of the issue, a real solution must always include the gospel. We need the love of God, shown to us in Christ Jesus, to transform our lives and help us break from the patterns that harm us. I can use my procrastination as an illustration. During my senior year in college, I finally stopped struggling with procrastination. Although I recognized the destructiveness of my pattern, I did not overcome it by trying harder. What made the difference was a newly found love for discipline. I wanted to do the work because I loved it. I would have done the assignments ten times over if I could have. This is how the gospel works in our lives. We cannot end our destructive behavioral cycles by trying harder or doing better. We escape them by transforming our loves. We escape the destructive power of sin by learning to love God more because of the forgiveness He has made available to us in Jesus.

▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+The psalmist recognized sin’s destructive power in his life, and he knew that God was the solution. In Psalm 32, he described two ways in which people persist in their sins and gave four reasons that repentance is always better than persisting in sin.

1. WAYS WE PERSIST IN SIN

2. WHY REPENTANCE IS BETTER

GOING DEEPER

+This section will examine several aspects of Psalm 32 in more detail. Psalm 32 is a wonderful example of the psalmist relaying his thoughts as they occur. The is not a highly structured psalm but has the appearance of a real-life person struggling to understand himself, his sin, and the God who rescues him.

1. WAYS WE PERSIST IN SIN

▣ PSALM 32:3–4, 9

Q: *What was the psalmist silent about in verse 3?*

Q: *Who tormented the psalmist while he was silent?*

There are some things we just don't like talking about. Our mistakes and shortcomings hover near the top of the list. They chide us when others bring up the ways we have failed. We would rather keep silent about our failures, not because the silence will take them away but perhaps because we hope to give ourselves and others a chance to forget them. The psalmist initially took the same approach to his sins. He hoped that if he ignored the reality of sin in his life, perhaps no one else will know, and maybe even God would overlook it. At the very least, the psalmist aimed to avoid the guilt of the sin he had grown so accustomed to. By God's grace, he was kept from this awful fate, but in this instance, God's grace was not pleasant. The psalmist said God would not let the matter rest. God Himself was a constant reminder that he was living with unconfessed sin. The knowledge of God led to a guilty conscious that was like a disease eating away at his bones. It sapped him of his strength. If anything was clear to him, it was that his sin could not be overlooked by a God who knew him inside and out. No one else might see the inner torment he was suffering, but he did. And it was more than he could bear.

Q: *Why is unconfessed sin so harmful for us spiritually?*

Q: *How is the mission of the church impeded by unconfessed sin?*

APPLICATION POINT – As with the psalmist, our sins are not something we like to think a lot about. Many Christians have become adept at deceiving others with outward tokens of righteousness even while unconfessed sin is rotting them from the inside out. The psalmist is pleading with you to end the ruse. While you may succeed in deceiving others, you cannot deceive the one who will hold all sin accountable. Furthermore, unconfessed sin will drain your capacity for holiness and erode your zeal for God's glory. You may keep up exterior appearances, but unconfessed sin will devour your soul. Sin will not go away if you ignore it. Instead, you merely become more comfortable with it. But this is a deadly comfort. Pray for God to do in your heart what He did for the psalmist. Pray that unconfessed sin will cause such an agony in your heart that you cannot live with it.

Q: *What is the comparison between an unrepentant sinner and a horse or a mule?*

Q: *Who was giving instruction in verse 8?*

God taught His people how to pursue a right relationship with Him. The psalmist used the first person in verse 8 to underline the directness of God's instruction, which has the effect of inserting God's voice into the psalm. The question was whether God's people would listen to His voice. One of the ways people often persist in sin is by simply refusing to receive God's instruction and resisting what He has taught them. The psalmist compared them to a horse or a mule that must be directed by a bit and bridle. Apart from a bit and bridle, a rider has no way to give instruction to the horse. One would think people would have more capacity to receive instruction than a horse, but the psalmist suggested that some people require more coercive instruction. Such a demeanor works against the person's best interests. God's instruction will bring joy. But rather than receiving it joyfully, they resent God's instruction and must learn the hard way.

Q: *How has God given us instruction today?*

Q: *How do people refuse to receive God's instruction?*

APPLICATION POINT – Do you like being compared to a horse? The Bible intrudes into our lives in ways we often don't appreciate. We want to decide what is right and good for us, but in doing so, we act like a horse trying to go its own way. God has created the world in such a way that it acts as bit and bridle for us. When we try to find joy by setting out on our path, we quickly discover we are constrained by the structures God has placed in creation. The more we fight against what God says is good and right, the more coercive His constraints feel. When we receive God's instruction, however, we often don't feel the constraints He has placed in the world. True freedom is found in yielding to God's will.

2. WHY REPENTANCE IS BETTER

■ ■ **PSALM 32:1-2, 5-8, 10-11**

Q: *How does persisting in unrepentant sin weigh on our conscience?*

Q: *How persistent was the psalmist's conscience when he ignored his sin?*

The psalmist wanted to ignore the sin in his life, but he quickly discovered he could not. No matter how hard he tried to pretend it was not there, his sin made itself known and the effects were more than he could bear. They were with him all the time. The psalmist expressed this in two ways. He said his groaning lasted all day long. We may, perhaps, think night would bring some reprieve, but no. His conscience was stirred day and night. Not a moment went by when he did not feel the weight of his sin. The man who confesses his sin, however, is blessed. It is interesting to compare the two opening lines of this psalm to Psalm 1. Psalm 1 begins “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.” Psalm 32:1–2 shows that this blessedness does not demand sinless perfection. We know this is impossible (Romans 3:23). Rather, the blessedness to be found in avoiding the ways of the wicked is available to those who have sinned but repented.

Q: *How does sin affect our ministry?*

Q: *Why is keeping up appearances more challenging than admitting our short comings?*

APPLICATION POINT – As the psalmist demonstrated, unrepentant sin is a tremendous burden on our souls, and the effects quickly multiply. When we are trapped in sin, not only does our conscience bear the burden of sin, our capacity to find joy in serving God is diminished. Anything we do to serve God is distorted into an attempt to alleviate our guilty conscience. Rather than seeking joy in serving God, we are seeking relief from the burden of our sins. When that relief does not come, and we continue to hold on to our sin, we are forced to let go of our ministry for God. If serving God does not relieve our guilty conscience, what is the point? Of course, serving God should never be about relieving the guilt we feel for sin. We serve God because we love Him, not because we need something from Him. Unrepentant sin distorts the joy we should have in serving God into a useless façade to appease our conscience.

Q: *How did the psalmist find forgiveness?*

Q: *What did Paul show by quoting Psalm 32:1-2 in Romans 4:7-8?*

When the psalmist stopped ignoring his sin and sought forgiveness, he found that God was ready to offer it. In Psalm 32, all the psalmist's energy was devoted to trying to cover up his sin. When he finally decided to seek forgiveness from God, he discovered he did not have to do anything to earn it. God's forgiveness is available for anyone who simply confesses their sins to Him in faith. In Genesis 15:6, Abraham was regarded as righteous simply because he believed God's word. The psalmist saw the same pattern at work in his own life. God counts no iniquity against the person who approaches Him in faith. The apostle Paul later linked these verses in Romans 4:1-12 to argue that the forgiveness of sins and the righteousness that results can only be found through faith, not by outward works such as circumcision. The forgiveness of sin is a gift God offers to everyone who confesses their need for Him. Although the psalmist was wearing himself out trying to ignore his sin, he did not have to do anything to find forgiveness for it.

Q: *How would earning our forgiveness only further enslave us to sin?*

Q: *What should forgiveness of sin free us for?*

APPLICATION POINT – There is no need to serve God to assuage a guilty conscience. There is also no need to serve God to earn forgiveness. Again, the psalmist has shown us a way to avoid a burdensome cycle that traps us in sin. If our forgiveness depended on our own efforts, we might feel entitled to our sins, regardless of the destruction it caused us. We could find solace in knowing the burden for forgiveness rested on us. If we wanted to take that burden on ourselves, it would be our decision. Instead, forgiveness can only be a gift for us. Forgiveness is secured because of what Christ has done on our behalf, not because of anything we can accomplish. This strips us of the freedom to persist in our sins. We do not pay the price of our forgiveness. Christ does. When we sin, we add to Christ's burden, not our own. Free forgiveness liberates us to seek submission to God's will rather than sin.

Q: *Why does the psalmist urge people to offer a prayer to God at a time when He may be found?*

Q: *What is the rush of great waters?*

The psalmist believed God's offer of forgiveness was free, but he foresaw a time when forgiveness would no longer be available. There is a time when those seeking God for forgiveness will not find Him. Instead, they will be swept away by the flood of God's judgment. The psalmist was alluding to the flood in Genesis 6–9. He saw a pattern in this text that would be repeated on a personal level throughout history. Just as those who were outside of the ark were swept away by the flood, there will come a time for everyone when the forgiveness of sin is no longer available, and God's judgement is certain. Those who find these times will regret having persisted in their sins.

Q: *If persisting in sin leads to personal torment and God's judgment, why do people do it?*

Q: *When will you be beyond God's forgiveness?*

APPLICATION POINT – The psalmist did not fully explain how the pattern he saw in the flood narrative would be repeated, but we can infer what he meant with the help of other Scriptures. While we are alive, we are never beyond God's forgiveness. The thief on the cross persisted in sin all the way to the morning of his death, but when he acknowledged his need for Jesus to remember him, Jesus declared that he would find himself in paradise on that day. Jesus's words show that this man was not beyond God's forgiveness, even at that late an hour in his life (Luke 23:39–43). A different scenario emerges in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31). The rich man died having persisted in his sin. When he sought relief from his pain, Abraham, who represents the will of God in this parable, said he was beyond help. The time of his forgiveness has passed. Forgiveness is available to us as long as we are alive, but if we persist in our sins until death, the time when forgiveness may be found has passed. Again, the psalmist shows us that God has ordered the world in such a way as to encourage us to break the patterns of destructive sin in our lives. If there was no limit on when God could be found, how could we be encouraged to break out of the pattern of sin in our lives?

❓: *Why are the sorrows of the wicked many?*

❓: *Why do the righteous, even though they are sinners, find joy?*

The psalmist concludes Psalm 32 by describing the contrasting fates of the righteous and the wicked. The wicked persist in their sins and multiply their sorrows. They never get beyond Psalm 32:3–4, and their lives are filled with sorrow because of it. The righteous, on the other hand, find themselves surrounded by God’s steadfast love. Without pretense, the psalmist called them to shout because they knew the joy that is found in God’s forgiveness. In this psalm, both the righteous and the wicked sin. The difference between them is that the righteous confess and find forgiveness while the wicked persist in their sin and find only condemnation.

❓: *Why do people believe God wants to keep them from joy?*

❓: *How can Psalm 32 help us redefine joy?*

APPLICATION POINT – Perhaps the greatest error of the modern world is believing that God wants to rob us of joy. This is the tragedy of persisting in sin. Sin distorts the true nature of joy. The longer we persist in sin, the more distorted our understanding of it becomes. The world believes they can find joy by persisting in their sin, but the psalmist shows they are in a tragic cycle that multiplies their sorrows. God does not want you to be stuck in sorrow. He yearns for you to find joy in the forgiveness of your sin. When we escape the devastating cycle of persisting in sin, we find the freedom to enjoy God’s goodness in His creation the way that He intended. We exchange a cycle of sorrow for a cycle of eternal joy.

NEXT STEPS

Psalm 32 highlights the importance of confession in the Christian life. For many Protestants, confession has become an unfamiliar concept. When we think of confession, our minds are drawn to Catholic and Orthodox traditions in which people confess their sins to a priest who then gives them instruction for finding forgiveness. While we disagree with how confession is practiced in these traditions, we should not disregard the importance of confession itself. Take some time to confess your sins to God in prayer this week. One thing Psalm 32 makes clear is that ignoring our sin multiplies its destructive power in our lives. Serious confession makes it impossible to ignore our sins. The very act demands that we draw attention to them. This is the first step to escaping the cycle of destructive sin.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

-Father, in you there is greater joy to be found than in anything this world has to offer. Keep me from ever thinking you plan to rob me of joy.

-Lord Jesus, the free forgiveness of my sin is possible because of your death on my behalf. Thank you for bearing the burden of my sin on the cross.

-Father, help me to embrace the clear instruction you have given in your Word. You have shown me the way of righteousness. Help me ignore the peril of worldly wisdom and embrace the life-giving truths of your Word.

-God, I confess to you that I am a sinner in desperate need of your grace. I do not want to hide my sin from you. Indeed, I cannot.

DEVOTION IN THE PSALMS

May 15, 2022 | *Praying for the Downfall of the Wicked*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

How do you respond to instances of clear evil?

Read Psalm 109.

Ask God to help you think critically about the issue of imprecatory prayers, that is, appeals to God to pour out wrath upon enemies

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Pray that God would hold unrepentant evil doers accountable.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

We should be thankful that God is able to hold people accountable to His holiness.

MEDITATE

*“He clothed himself with cursing as his coat; may it soak into his body like water, like oil into his bones!”
(Psalm 109:18).*

GETTING STARTED

+This section introduces the concept of imprecatory psalms and considers how Christians should respond to these biblical prayers.

Q: How do you feel about the concept of political correctness?

Q: Why has political correctness become so widely practiced in our society?

Political correctness is the avoidance of speech and actions that may offend others. The concept is intended to promote a level of civility among colleagues who may be unaware of each other's background. By avoiding certain topics or adhering to an accepted level of inclusivity, everyone can work together for a common purpose. Political correctness is often maligned by those who see it as a tool to control others and enforce a change in social or moral behavior. They often parody political correctness for its excesses. In many circles, political correctness is believed to be a hindrance to problem solving and, in some instances, counter to common sense.

In Psalm 109, we see the psalms at their most politically incorrect. The psalmist prays for his enemy's downfall, and his derision quickly escalates beyond a level any modern person would feel comfortable with. Most of us would not pray Psalm 109 against our worst enemy, yet there these words are in our Bibles. We cannot turn away without asking what God would have us glean from Psalm 109 like we would any other part of God's Word. Psalm 109 is called an imprecatory psalm, one that is a prayer that a curse or calamity will befall an enemy, and is fairly common, especially in psalms of lament (Psalm 3:7). A few psalms, such as 109, are given wholly to imprecation. How are Christians supposed to understand and apply them? This lesson will encourage you to follow the psalmist's example and make prayers of imprecation, which is not a politically correct approach to these psalms. Many people, even Christians, recoil against the idea of praying for someone's downfall. They devise arguments for why we should never pray in this way, pointing to the words of Jesus which admonishing us to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). Yet, the imprecatory psalms remain. Rather than ignoring the parts of the Bible we do not like, a far better approach is to understand them and, if necessary, adjust our outlook to align with the words of Scripture, even if it makes us politically incorrect.

Q: Why would a society that denies truth have an inherent problem with imprecation?

Q: How do you see relativism at work in your social circles?

APPLICATION POINT – Relativism is the denial of absolute truth. Although it is hard to imagine why, relativism was a popular philosophy on university campuses and among social elites at the end of the twentieth century. Thankfully, it is in retreat today, even in contexts where it formerly thrived. It turns out that relativism is completely incapable of upholding any kind of morality. Adherents liked it when Christian morality was in the crosshairs, but cultural developments such as #MeToo and others quickly exposed its moral bankruptcy. This is also the point where relativism collides with imprecatory psalms such as Psalm 109. Apart from absolute truth, Christians have no means of identifying evil and praying against it. Although relativism as a philosophical movement is in decline, such ideas leave a lasting mark on the culture, even among those who would not claim to be relativist and do not spend time thinking about philosophical relativism. Christians must affirm the reality of absolute truth. Every part of our faith, from the basics of the gospel to the validity of imprecatory prayers, rests on the reality of truth and our being able to recognize truth. Always be ready to push back on relativism when it crops up in your thoughts or when you encounter it elsewhere.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Psalm 109 contains three main sections. The first part (Psalm 109:1–5) petitions God to speak in response to the message of the psalmist’s opponents. The second section (Psalm 109:6–20) is the main imprecation. In it, the psalmist calls for God’s judgment to come against his enemies in every way possible. In the third section (Psalm 109:21–31), the psalmist appeals to God’s tendency to rescue the needy from evil.

1. SEEKING VINDICATION FROM GOD
2. THE IMPRECATION
3. GOD RESCUES THE NEEDY

GOING DEEPER

+This section will examine the psalmist’s prayer to understand the nature of imprecation. It will also draw crucial applications for making imprecatory prayers. Imprecatory prayers can be done with a wrong spirit. Making these prayers from a selfish or unrepentant heart can quickly lead you down a sinful path.

1. SEEKING VINDICATION FROM GOD

■ PSALMS 109:1–5

❓: *Why did the psalmist feel as though God had been silent as he suffered?*

❓: *Why was God's voice crucial for the psalmist at this moment?*

Psalm 109 begins with a focus on speech. The psalmist was speaking to God in prayer. He was asking God to speak. He wanted God to speak against those who had spoken against him. In making his request, the psalmist was careful to affirm that he spoke in praise of God. The emphasis on speech occurs because the psalmist was in an altercation with his enemies, and so far, it had been one-sided. His enemies were attacking him. His only hope was for God to speak back.

The enemies' speech is characterized in three ways. First, their speech was dishonest. Their accusations against the psalmist distorted the truth. Second, their speech was hateful. They made no attempt to conceal their animosity toward the psalmist. Finally, their speech was an attack against him. They intended to harm him emotionally. Perhaps their words would even lead to physical harm. He portrayed their words as a mob, saying they had encircled him. In response, the psalmist asked only for a word from God. Nothing more was needed, and nothing less would do.

❓: *How does the psalmist's emphasis on God's speech limit our imprecatory prayers?*

❓: *Is imprecation a type of vigilante justice?*

APPLICATION POINT –One argument against Christians making imprecatory prayers against those who are committed to doing evil is that such prayers would naturally incite Christians to take action to bring the intent of these prayers to fruition. This concern is certainly warranted. We would typically encourage believers to act on their prayers. If we pray for someone to accept the gospel, we will desire to share the gospel with him or her. So, the fear is that if Christians pray for the downfall of the abortion clinic in town, they may take violent action against the clinic themselves. Such action would not only be unlawful, it would also violate the clear teaching of Scripture. Imprecatory prayers are not typically ones that believers should act on. We need look no further than the psalmist himself as an example. In response to the wickedness of his enemies, he asked God to speak. He did

not challenge the evil doers himself. He asked God to condemn the wicked and cut short his days. He did not act on his prayer or appoint himself as the instrument of God's justice. If we follow his example, we will ask God to act and leave the matter in His hands. Do not use imprecatory prayers as warrant for doing evil yourself.

Q: *What made the enemies' attack against the psalmist particularly wrong?*

Q: *How did the psalmist respond to the wrongdoing he was suffering?*

Following his call for God to speak on his behalf, the psalmist drew attention to how his enemies' attacks were particularly evil. Not only were they unjust and unwarranted, they were done in response to the psalmist's goodwill toward them. The use of the word "love" suggests more than a casual acquaintance or an isolated act. The psalmist was invested in their lives and sought their good, but they turned against him. They used his love as an opportunity to do harm.

Q: *How would you respond in similar circumstances?*

Q: *How does the enemies' callousness help us understand the rest of this psalm?*

APPLICATION POINT – A natural response to what the psalmist endured is vindictiveness, reciprocating the animosity shown to us. Notice that the psalmist did not do this. Instead, he prayed. Of course, his prayer was a scathing indictment against his enemies, but this was between him and God. The psalmist left the matter in God's hands. At the end of the psalm, he pleaded for God to help him because he was too poor to defend himself. In none of it did he retaliate with evil. He was willing to suffer innocently while he trusted God to hold his enemies accountable. Again, he modeled godliness while calling for God to act against evil. Imprecatory prayers are not vindictive. We are not repaying evil for evil. We are calling on God to act while we suffer innocently.

2. THE IMPRECATION

PSALM 109:6–20

Q: *What is the worst thing the psalmist asked to befall his enemy?*

Q: *How could the enemy's prayer be sinful?*

The psalmist begins his imprecation in verse 6. His words are so scalding that it makes us uncomfortable. The psalmist had no mercy for his enemy, and he did not anticipate God would either. Furthermore, the psalmist called for both forward and backward generational consequences for his evil.

We need to keep several matters in mind as we read this imprecation. First, there is a presumption on the psalmist's part that his enemy would not repent. This is the key assumption underlying all imprecatory prayers. If the wicked would repent of their evil, we should expect God to forgive them and rejoice when He did. This was Jesus's intention in Matthew 5:44. We should pray that God will bring our enemies to repentance. But in the psalmist's mind, this repentance would not come. His enemy had become so hardened against God's holiness, he would not turn from his evil and seek repentance. Therefore, he was liable to suffer the full measure of God's wrath.

Second, since the enemy only desired evil, his prayers could not be anything but sinful. Anything he asked God would be in pursuit of evil purposes. We should not think the psalmist was asking God to ignore his enemy's righteous prayers or to count his cry for mercy in repentance against him. Again, the enemy was committed to doing evil. If God were to listen to his prayers, He would be joining the enemy in evil purposes, and that is something God cannot do.

Finally, we must understand that unrepentant sin has natural consequences that often, though not always, come to fruition in life. It is not surprising when gang members become victims of violent crimes. They have committed themselves to a world in which violence is glorified. They are tragic victims of their own choices. When the wicked are caught up in their wickedness, their children naturally suffer as well. If you were to pray for the pornography shop in your community to go out of business, the owner and his children would suffer financially, but even children have no right to profit from gross evil committed at the expense of millions. May the children of every man who profits from pornography be destitute! Furthermore, the evil deeds of the wicked highlight the wickedness of those who came before them. We see this principle at work throughout the Old Testament (2 Kings 13:10–11). The sins of the son are a witness against the sins of the father.

Q: *Is it inconsistent for Christians to pray for God to judge the wicked for their evil deeds?*

Q: *Do imprecatory prayers limit the grace of God?*

APPLICATION POINT – It is not wrong for Christians to pray that God would stop evil, even if it means judging evildoers for their wickedness. Some people may object to imprecatory prayers, arguing that everyone is guilty of sin, and therefore no one should be eager for God to hold others accountable for their sin. They rightly claim that all have sinned against God (Romans 3:23). This is an essential part of the Christian confession (Romans 10:9). We cannot deny our own sin and know Christ as our Savior (1 John 1:8). But when Christians make imprecatory prayers, they do so from their standing in Jesus Christ. They have repented of sin (Acts 2:38). It would be inconsistent for us to expect anyone who has refused to repent of sin to be forgiven. Imprecatory prayers rest on the condition that the wicked will not repent of their sin. Christians should always keep this qualification in mind. We make these prayers with the knowledge that if repentance does happen, we will rejoice in God's grace with our new brothers and sisters in Christ. It may be that God would answer imprecatory prayers to bring sinners to salvation. When faced with the reality of God's judgment, sinners can clearly see their need for repentance.

Q: *How does Acts 1:20 use Psalm 109:8?*

Q: *Why does Acts apply this verse to Judas?*

Judas, one of Jesus's twelve disciples, betrayed Him to the Jewish authorities (Acts 1:16). Afterward, he took his own life (Acts 1:18). Peter, in addressing the remaining disciples, declared that Judas's actions fulfilled the Scriptures and then quoted Psalm 109:8, in which the psalmist prayed that God would allow the office of his enemy to be taken by another. This may be confusing for us because the psalmist's words were addressed to his own enemy. Wasn't Peter taking this verse out of context by applying it to Judas? The answer to this difficulty is that the apostles and New Testament authors often saw events in the Old Testament as patterns that would be repeated in the life of Christ and his early followers. Peter was making a connection between what Judas did to Jesus and Psalm 109. Judas had followed the pattern established by the psalmist's enemy, and Peter envisioned Jesus in the place of the psalmist. Therefore, he understood Matthias's appointment to the Twelve as a fulfillment of Psalm 109:8. They were following Scripture by appointing someone to take Judas's office. This may seem strange to us, but the New Testament authors made these connections frequently. It is possible that the Old

Testament authors even anticipated that their words would be utilized in this manner. David seems to have understood his own life as a pattern of the Anointed One who would follow him (2 Samuel 22:51; 2 Samuel 23:5).

Q: *In what ways do we continue to see these patterns today?*

Q: *How does the experience of Jesus change how we understand Psalm 109?*

APPLICATION POINT – If Psalm 109 is a pattern the disciples recognized as being repeated in Jesus’s life, we should not be surprised when it is repeated in our lives. We should not be surprised when the world hates us and seeks our harm. It happened to the psalmist. It happened to Jesus. It will happen to us. Jesus anticipated it (John 15:18), and John affirmed it (1 John 3:13). When we suffer in this pattern, a prayer of imprecation is an appropriate response. John alluded to this in his letter (1 John 3:14–15). Those who do not reciprocate love will meet eternal death.

Q: *How does the psalmist’s prayer shift at verse 16?*

Q: *What metaphor did the psalmist use to describe his enemy’s actions?*

At Psalm 109:16, the psalmist shifted from making imprecations to explaining why the enemy deserved this. He argued that his enemy would reap what he sowed. His enemy showed cruelty to others; he would receive cruelty in return. He cursed rather than blessed; he would be cursed rather than blessed. The psalmist described his enemy’s wicked deeds as a cloak that he clothed himself in. Since he voluntarily took on these curses, he must now wear them and all the imprecation that comes with them.

Q: *Can human justice systems adequately punish evil?*

Q: *How does God’s justice help us cope with evil?*

APPLICATION – Unrepentant sinners will be condemned eternally for their sin. This is a sobering thought, but it also brings a satisfaction to our sense of justice that we will never find in the justice of this world. It is right for the governments to seek justice by punishing those who do evil, but human justice will always be imperfect. On June 11, 2001, Timothy McVeigh was executed for his role in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. He paid for his crime with his life, but his actions took the lives of 168 people and injured 680 others. Even in executing McVeigh, the United States government was limited in the justice that could be achieved in this case. McVeigh only had one life. He took 168. Our justice is imperfect even at its best. Imagine if Adolf Hitler had survived to face the world at the Nüremberg trials. He killed six million Jews in the most massive genocide the world has ever seen. How could we have achieved justice in his case? God does not have this problem. He is eternally holy. He will punish sin for eternity. We should find comfort in knowing that those who commit evil in this world will not get away with it. They will ultimately answer to God.

3. GOD RESCUES THE NEEDY

■ PSALM 109:21–31

- ❓ *How did the psalmist's neediness make it more likely that God would respond to his prayer?*
- ❓ *Why did the psalmist insist that his enemies must witness his deliverance by God?*

In this final section, the psalmist moved on from imprecation and expressed his trust in God's ability to deliver him from the direst circumstances. God's compassion for those in need spans the entire Bible. God delivered the nation of Israel from the bondage of the Egyptians because they were helpless and suffering severely (Exodus 3:7–8a). Paul said God chose to save the weak and foolish of this world to shame the wise and powerful (1 Corinthians 1:26–29). Although the imprecation was done, his enemies were not forgotten. The psalmist prayed they would witness his deliverance at God's hand. Their evil plots would come to nothing. Furthermore, the way of salvation would be evident to them, but they would be on the outside looking in.

Q: *How does God's faithfulness to rescue those who trust in Him transform imprecatory prayer?*

Q: *Why does God find our weakness attractive?*

APPLICATION POINT – Even though the psalmist issued a scathing prayer against his enemies, his hope was ultimately in God's salvation, not in their demise. Imprecatory prayers are thus limited. We may be satisfied in seeing God's justice against evil, but true followers of Christ know they need more than this. They need the forgiveness of sin provided to them in Jesus Christ. God will be glorified in both the judgment of the wicked and the salvation of lost sinners who repent of their sin and trust in Jesus for forgiveness. Like the psalmist, we dare not allow imprecatory prayers to become the only word we offer to God and to the world.

NEXT STEPS

Guided by the principles drawn from Psalm 109, make imprecatory prayers. It is never wrong for Christians to ask God to intervene and stop evil. This is the purpose of imprecatory prayers. Making imprecatory prayers requires you to recognize evil and those who are committed to it, but it must be done based on biblical authority. We should never make imprecatory prayers based on our preferences. Wherever you find evil in our society, pray that God would bring it to an end if those involved refuse to repent and seek forgiveness in Christ.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

-Father, help me keep close tabs on my heart. I want to pray against evil. Keep me from inadvertent evil.

-Jesus, you have provided a way for even the most hardened sinner to repent of sin and find forgiveness. I pray the Holy Spirit will convict and turn hearts toward you.

-God, frustrate the plans of those who intend to carry out evil in this city. They contend against you. Show them they are no match for your strength.

-Father, help me think through imprecatory prayers. These prayers are part of your inspired Word just like every other psalm I've studied. Help me understand them accurately and apply them faithfully.



DEVOTION IN THE PSALMS

May 22, 2022 | *The Messiah and His Kingdom*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Why is the Bible divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament?

Read Psalm 110.

Ask God to help you understand the far-reaching implications of this psalm.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The Messiah will preside over an uncontested kingdom and a new covenant.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Yearn for the day when the Messiah's reign will be fully and finally recognized.

MEDITATE

"The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek'"
(Psalm 110:4).

GETTING STARTED

+This section introduces the lesson by drawing attention to the prominence of Psalm 110 in the New Testament.

Q: *What is the most significant passage in the Old Testament?*

Q: *What makes a person or idea influential?*

The 1994 film *Forrest Gump* tells the fictional story of the film's namesake. Forrest is a slow witted but kindhearted man who innocently finds himself at the center of 20th-century America's most defining events. He was the originator of Elvis Presley's famous dance moves, a key player on Bear Bryant's 1960s Alabama championship football teams, and a Medal of Honor recipient for his military service in Vietnam. He alerted authorities to the burglary that initiated the Watergate scandal. He was the owner of a major ship fleet and shrimping industry and then became an early investor in the Apple Computer Company. His final act in the spotlight is becoming a news-making motivational figure simply because he "felt like runnin'." He met three U.S. presidents and appeared on national television at least six times. Sometimes he influenced the course of events in ways others would not notice, but at other times, astute observers in the movie see the unassuming man they know making national headlines again.

In some ways, you could consider Psalm 110 the *Forrest Gump* of the New Testament. Everywhere you turn, Psalm 110 keeps showing up. This psalm is quoted at least eight times in the New Testament, and some scholars estimate it is alluded to about twenty-five additional times. It appears around every corner of the New Testament and had a significant influence on the theology of the early church. What many people do not realize is that Psalm 110 also utilizes several themes that appear elsewhere in the Old Testament. Thus, it functions as a sort of crossroads in the Bible. It looks back to significant themes in the Old Testament and forward to the person and ministry of Jesus, the central figure of the New Testament.

Q: *What difficulty often arises when the New Testament quotes the Old Testament?*

Q: *How should we respond when the New Testament seems to disregard the intent of the Old Testament authors?*

APPLICATION POINT – Psalm 110's connections with the rest of the Bible are a signal for us to pay close attention to it. If we can understand this psalm's message, we will be able to put together several key themes for understanding the entire Bible and gain a deeper appreciation of Christianity's relationship to the Old Testament.

The goal of this lesson is to help you understand Psalm 110 the way the New Testament authors did.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Psalm 110 can be divided into two parts, each beginning with a declaration from God to the Messiah. Each of these initial declarations is quoted multiple times in the New Testament. Thus, this structure would seem to capture how the New Testament views this psalm.

1. WAITING FOR THE MESSIANIC REIGN

2. THE PRIEST AND WARRIOR KING

GOING DEEPER

+This section will follow the two-part structure of Psalm 110. For each part, we will consider the psalm's meaning, how it connects to other parts of the Old Testament, and the points made by the New Testament authors with these verses.

1. WAITING FOR THE MESSIANIC REIGN

■ **PSALM 110:1-3; GENESIS 3:15 AND 49:10; NUMBERS 24:17; MATTHEW 22:43-45; ACTS 2:34-35; HEBREWS 1:3**

Q: *Is the anointed king active or passive in Psalm 110:1-3?*

Q: *What is the main point of Psalm 110:3?*

The psalmist obviously never knew his words would be featured so prominently in the New Testament. While the New Testament's use of Psalm 110:1 draws a lot of attention, it is important for us to remember that these verses had

a meaning before they ever appeared in the New Testament. Psalm 110:1–3 makes two main points concerning the Messiah’s reign. It is established by God’s power, and God’s people will consent to His rule. God’s role in securing the Messiah’s throne is made doubly clear in Psalm 110:1. He commands the Messiah to sit at His right hand. We might expect God to command Him to begin a military campaign, but instead He is to sit at the place of highest honor. God will secure His kingdom by making the Messiah’s enemies His footstool, meaning they will be made to submit to His rule. God will accomplish this on the Messiah’s behalf. At least in this passage, the emphasis rests on God’s role in establishing the Messiah’s kingdom. Psalm 110:2 affirms this point by showing that the Lord will stretch forth the Messiah’s scepter from His throne in Zion. The scepter is a symbol of royal authority. By sending this symbol forth, God will reiterate that this king’s rule is established by His divine power.

Essentially every scholar commenting on Psalm 110:3 concedes that the details of this verse are nearly impossible to interpret with much certainty. No one is certain of the imagery behind the phrases “the womb of the morning” and “the dew of your youth.” Nevertheless, the main point of Psalm 110 is easy enough to grasp. The people of God will eagerly consent to the rule of the Messiah. They will give their strength to God’s purposes in securing the Messiah’s reign.

❓: *Why should we be encouraged by God’s active role in setting up the Messiah’s kingdom?*

❓: *What does our consent to the Messiah’s rule look like?*

APPLICATION POINT – Our role in Psalm 110 is easy to identify. If we confess faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sin, we are part of the Messiah’s people. Our duty is to eagerly consent to the rule of Jesus, even if the world around us remains hostile toward Him and us. In Ephesians 5:8–10, Paul said, “At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ... and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.” This is a simple explanation of what it means to embrace the rule of the Messiah. We are to discern what is pleasing to Jesus, our king, and do it. Paul gave a broad outline of what it looks like to walk in a way that pleases Jesus in Ephesians 4:17–6:9.

❓: *How does Psalm 110:1 connect with Genesis 3:15?*

❓: *How does Psalm 110:2 connect with Genesis 49:10 and Numbers 24:17?*

The psalmist's allusions to other Old Testament texts inform us of his view of Israel's messianic king. The psalmist recorded God proclaiming that He would make the enemies a footstool for the anointed king. In the ancient Near East, it was common for a victorious king to demonstrate his superiority over his enemies by stepping on them, usually on their head or neck, a tradition that is certainly alluded to here. The messianic context here gives the phrase additional significance. Genesis 3:15 has been regarded by many Christians as the Bible's first promise of a coming Messiah. Immediately after the first human couple sinned, God announced a future offspring of the woman who will contend with the offspring of the serpent. The woman's offspring will be victorious over the offspring of the serpent and crush its head. The serpent, even in certain defeat, will strike the heel of the woman's offspring even as the crushing deathblow is being delivered. Christians identify the woman's offspring as Jesus and the serpent's offspring as Satan and his followers. Thus, it is believed Genesis 3:15 anticipates the coming of a messianic figure and His victory over sin and Satan. In claiming that the Messiah's enemies will be made His footstool, Psalm 110:1 attaches itself to Genesis 3:15 and the messianic hope established there.

The scepter also links Psalm 110 to two other significant messianic texts. Genesis 49:10 speaks of a scepter that will not depart from Judah. This alludes to a royal dynasty that will emerge from Judah, one of the twelve tribal heads of Israel, and eventually revealed to be David's royal dynasty (2 Samuel 7:16). Jesus is the eventual member of this dynasty whose reign will be everlasting (Matthew 1:1–17). Numbers 24:17 speaks of a scepter that will arise out of Israel, referencing an individual who will reign in Israel and will crush the forehead of Moab, as in Genesis 3:15. The word for "scepter" in Psalm 110:2 is a synonym for the word used in these other passages, but the psalmist drew on these previous texts to describe the reign of the anointed king.

Q: *Does your devotional Bible reading help you see how different parts of the Bible are connected?*

Q: *Why is it important to notice when a biblical author referred to another biblical passage or used a theme found elsewhere in the Bible?*

APPLICATION POINT – Oakwood is emphasizing the importance of a strong devotional life this year. As you encounter the Bible devotionally, it is important to gain a better understanding of how the different parts of the Bible fit together to form a unified message. Sometimes our devotional reading habits can make this difficult. If you are only reading a few verses a day, it will be challenging to put everything together. But trying to adopt a reading plan you don't have time for is not the answer. If this is your situation, taking sermon notes in the Bible you use for your devotion can be a good idea. Quickly going over these notes can remind you of how your

pastors have connected the passage you are reading to other parts of God’s Word. You also need to evaluate the devotional books you are reading. There are good materials that will guide you through a devotional time in just a few minutes, but there are also a lot of trite materials that will not challenge you to grow. Make sure you choose good resources to guide your devotional times.

❓: *What was the context of Jesus’s use of Psalm 110:1 in Matthew 22:44, Mark 12:36, and Luke 20:42-43?*

❓: *What was Jesus’s main point in posing this question to His audience?*

Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem and His parables during Passover week drew the ire of the religious leaders. They desperately wanted to expose Him as a fraud or trick Him into saying something that would cause trouble with the Romans. On one occasion, Jesus turned the tables and posed a question to them. The religious leaders believed in the coming messianic king, but did they truly understand the scope of His nature, identity, and mission? Jesus’s question concerned an implication drawn from the first part of Psalm 110:1. How could the author of this psalm, David, refer to the Messiah as Lord if the Messiah would be one of his descendants? The underlying assumption of Jesus’s question is that someone called “my Lord” is inherently superior to the one speaking, but how could the Messiah be superior to David if He were born after David? A father would never refer to his son as “Lord.” The implication Jesus wished the religious leaders to see is that the Messiah was before David, alluding to the Messiah’s coequality with the Father and His divinity. The religious leaders refused to draw this conclusion, but they also refused to question Jesus again.

In Acts 2:34–35, Peter quoted Psalm 110:1 in his speech on Pentecost. The apostles had received the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 2:3–4), and Peter was explaining to the crowd the meaning of what had happened. He did so partly by drawing a contrast between David and Jesus. When David died, he remained in the grave, but when Jesus died, He rose from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father. From beside God’s throne, He had poured out His Spirit upon His followers. The coming of the Holy Spirit is a natural implication of Jesus’s ascension to the right hand of the Father. David did not rise again, but he anticipated the resurrection and ascension of the Messiah and the subsequent coming of the Holy Spirit.

❓: *Why is Jesus’s resurrection and ascension important for us?*

Q: *Which of Jesus's roles are you unwilling to face?*

APPLICATION POINT – The religious leaders understood the point Jesus was making about the Messiah, but they were not willing to accept what He taught as true. Instead, they preferred to go about their lives as if what Jesus said was not true. It is alarmingly easy, even for Christians, to follow their behavior. We may be willing to acknowledge Christ as coequal and coeternal with the Father, but are we willing to accept the implications this has for our lives? Jesus is our resurrected Lord and Savior. He sits at the Father's right hand in heaven. This means He is Lord over every single aspect of our lives, including what we do in our free time, how we spend our income, and what our goals for the future are. We may act like none of this is true of Jesus, but only by denying what we know to be true.

2.THE PRIEST AND WARRIOR KING

■ **PSALMS 110:4–7; GENESIS 14:17–24; HEBREWS 5:1–10, 7:1–28**

Q: *Who did Melchizedek serve as priest?*

Q: *What is the main theme of Psalm 110:5–6? How does it relate to Psalm 110:1?*

The first half of Psalm 110 says the Messiah will be God's king to reign over the earth. The second half expands the messianic king's role beyond the normal conventions of a king. The messianic king will also function as a priest. Melchizedek was a king over (Jeru)Salem who blessed Abraham. Remarkably, Genesis 14:18 identifies Melchizedek as a priest for God Most High. "Most High" frequently occurs in the Old Testament to refer to the God of the Bible (e.g., Genesis 14:22; Numbers 24:16; Deuteronomy 32:8; Daniel 7:18). Furthermore, there is no record in any of the data we possess of a Canaanite deity known as "god most high." Therefore, as odd as it may seem, it appears Melchizedek worshipped the God of Abraham, the same God we worship.

The book of Genesis is silent on how Melchizedek came to worship God and how widely God was worshipped in Salem beyond Melchizedek. Nevertheless, Genesis 14:17–24 is clear that he was a priest-king. In ancient Israel, the priesthood was given to the tribe of Levi (Numbers 3:11–13). The kings of Israel, beginning with David, descended

from the tribe of Judah. Thus, it would be unexpected for any person to be both king and priest. Psalm 110:4, however, maintains that the Messiah will be a priest-king in the same manner Melchizedek was.

Psalm 110:5–7 describes the Messiah as a warrior-king. It is difficult to tell whether the pronoun “he” refers to the Lord or the messianic king in Psalm 110:5–7, but the main idea is clear enough. The nations will be brought into submission to the Lord and His anointed king. The priest-warrior-king will subdue the nations and crush any opposition to His rule. The reference to the brook is difficult to understand. The psalmist was possibly highlighting the warrior nature of the king by showing him encamped with his soldiers on the battlefield and away from the royal goblets in the palace. Or he may have meant the king would refresh himself after the long and bloody battle.

❓: *Why is it good for us that Jesus will be both priest and king?*

❓: *Why is the vision of Jesus as a warrior-king unpopular today?*

APPLICATION POINT – Democratic societies recognize that the separation of powers protects liberty. If one person or group is given unlimited power, there is nothing to stop him from taking away freedoms when it is to their advantage to do so. Thus, in our context, it may be difficult to understand why the psalmist celebrated the convergence of the priestly and kingly roles in the person of the Messiah. To understand his point, we have to go all the way back to the beginning of humanity. In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve functioned as the rulers over God’s creation (Genesis 1:26). They also had free communication with God and served Him by serving His creation (Genesis 2:15–17, 19), and in that way they also functioned as God’s priests. When Adam and Eve sinned, they no longer functioned as priest, and their dominion was consistently challenged. In Christ, these two roles converge again in one person. Christ is a picture of what God intended humanity to be. Furthermore, once we are united with Christ, we function as priests (1 Peter 2:9) and share in His kingship (Ephesians 2:6). In Christ, we are becoming what God intended humanity to be. We often hear people talk about finding fulfillment in life. Christians know true fulfillment can only be found in becoming what God intended us to be in Christ.

❓: *Who is punished by God in Psalm 110:5–6?*

❓: *What does the verb “shatter” mean in this context?*

We have already seen how Psalm 110:4 references Genesis 14:17–24 by referring to Melchizedek. Melchizedek is at the center of the New Testament’s use of Psalm 110:4, so we will wait until the next section to discuss Genesis 14 in more detail.

Psalm 110:5–7 describes the nations being brought into submission to God and His anointed king. This is also a frequent theme in the Old Testament. The Old Testament prophets frequently described God’s judgment as the arrival of “the day of the Lord.” In Isaiah 13, the prophet described God’s judgment of Babylon as the arrival of the day of the Lord (Isaiah 13:6, 9). Zechariah commanded the people to seek the Lord to avoid being caught up in the day of the Lord’s judgment (Zechariah 2:3–7). In every instance, the day of the Lord refers to an absolute victory for God and an absolute judgment on God’s enemies. In Psalm 2, the kings of the earth are told to submit to the Son before they suffer God’s wrath (Psalm 2:10–12).

❓: *In what ways do you see the nations, even the United States, resisting God’s rule?*

❓: *How can you ensure your personal submission to God’s rule even if your nation does not?*

APPLICATION POINT – A quick perusal of any news source reveals that the nations are still rebelling against God. The names of the nations are different than the ones found in the Bible, but the similarities are easy to see. This places Christians in a challenging position. Many of us are proud of our national identity, but we can never be so committed to our national identity that we become complicit in the ways our country rebels against God’s rule. When our nation adopts policies and takes actions that oppose biblical truth, we must be ready and willing to admit that our nation is opposing God, and we have to be clear about who will receive our ultimate loyalty. On the day of God’s wrath, we want to be counted among the people of God rather than among the people of any nation.

❓: *Why does the author of Hebrews argue that Christ’s priesthood is better than Levi’s?*

❓: *Why was a different priesthood needed?*

In the New Testament, Melchizedek is mentioned in Hebrews 5:6 and 7:1–28. The main purpose of the author of Hebrews is to show the superiority of Jesus over every aspect of the old covenant, including its priests, by utilizing Psalm 110:4 and the implications it draws from Genesis 14:17–24. The author of Hebrews makes two main arguments. First, he argued that since the Levites paid tribute to Melchizedek, Melchizedek’s priesthood must be superior (Hebrews 7:4–10). The astute Bible reader will note that Melchizedek lived during the time of Abraham. The old covenant and the Levitical priesthood did not come until 400 years later. So how did the author of Hebrews conclude that the Levites paid a tribute to Melchizedek? When Abraham paid a tribute to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:19–20), the Levites did as well because in the biblical way of thinking they were in Abraham. Since Jesus is a priest in the order of Melchizedek, His priesthood and His covenant, the new covenant, must by extension be superior to the Levitical priesthood and the old covenant.

Second, the author of Hebrews argued that since Melchizedek’s priesthood was perpetual, his priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood. In making this argument, he was exploiting the mysterious nature of Melchizedek in Genesis 14:17–24. Melchizedek was a priest of God, but we have no record of how God revealed Himself to Melchizedek or under what circumstances he served God. We do not know when he became God’s priest or when he died and stopped being God’s priest. The author of Hebrews believed that since we are not told, then Melchizedek’s priesthood perpetuates forever. Compared to the Levitical priests, Melchizedek’s priesthood is obviously superior. Their priesthood ended in death, but Melchizedek’s remains forever. There is no end to the time when Jesus will be able to save those who draw near to God (Hebrews 7:25). Since Christ is a priest in the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4), His priesthood and His covenant are superior to the Levitical priests and their covenant.

❓ *Why is it sometimes hard to understand how the New Testament authors interpreted the Old Testament?*

❓ *What is the significance of the old covenant and its laws for Christians?*

APPLICATION POINT – The New Testament authors often interpreted the Old Testament in ways that are difficult for us to understand. Part of the difficulty is our place in history. We live in a modernized society that promises new technologies and new ways of thinking, and new behaviors are “inherently better” than what existed in the past. If we could see beyond the modernist hedge around us, we would discover that most people throughout history did not think as we do. This helps us understand why the New Testament authors interpreted the Old Testament the way they did. The New Testament authors were not always concerned with the things that consume the interests of modern interpreters. When they read the Old Testament, they thought it more important to look for themes and patterns that would be repeated and eventually fulfilled in Christ. It might be hard for us moderns to accept, but it is possible the New Testament authors had a better understanding of what the Old Testament authors meant

than we do. They lived a lot closer to them historically and their patterns of thinking aligned more closely to that of the Old Testament authors than ours do. Psalm 110:4 is a perfect illustration of this. The psalmist read Genesis 14:17–24 and saw a perpetual priesthood that would be fulfilled in the Messiah. The author of Hebrews followed the psalmist’s lead. How could we be so certain the author of Genesis didn’t intend for his readers to see Melchizedek’s priesthood as perpetual? While we are down this road, if we take a critical look at other aspects of modern society, we might find other ways in which modernism is failing on its promise.

NEXT STEPS

One goal of Oakwood’s emphasis on your devotional life is to help you grow in your knowledge and understanding of God’s Word. As you read the New Testament during your devotional times, you will often come across a quotation of the Old Testament. These are often indented on the page. Most Bibles will have a note in the margin saying where the quote comes from. If you are like me, you are often in a rush and read right over these quotations without ever trying to understand what either the Old Testament or the New Testament author is saying. When time allows, slow down and consider what the authors of Scripture were saying. If you don’t have time right then, keep a list of some quotations and go back to them when you do. Learning to follow the thoughts of the New Testament authors as they read the Old Testament is very rewarding.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God’s Word this week.

God, I thank you for your providence over history. You have orchestrated everything that has ever happened and ever will happen in a way that will bring glory to your Son.

Jesus, you are indeed a priest after the order of Melchizedek. There is no end to your priesthood. There is no limit on the forgiveness to be found in you.

Father, help me understand your Word, even when it is challenging. I want to know you and reading what you have revealed in your Word is the best way to do that.

Lord, strengthen my faith at a time when it seems that the nations are bent upon opposing you. I do not want to fit in with the crowd if it means I have to put my faith aside.



DEVOTION IN THE PSALMS

May 29, 2022 | Seeking Refuge in the Anointed One

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

How do you see the nations raging against God and His Anointed today?

Read Psalm 2.

Ask God to use this lesson to help you behold the beauty of Christ.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

God and His Anointed will judge with wrath those who refuse to submit to their rule.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Seek refuge in the Son.

MEDITATE

“Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him” (Psalm 2:11–12).

GETTING STARTED

+This section introduces the main ideas of Psalm 2.

Q: *Why do people rebel against authority?*

Q: *Do you think people rebel less as they mature?*

One cliché in high schools is the group of students known as “rebels.” If you attended a public high school, you are probably familiar with them. Every teenager has rebellious moments, but the rebels in high school take it to another level. They find their identity in defying authority. The odd thing is that what the rebels intend to accomplish by their rebellion is typically unclear. It is not as if they are going to overthrow the authority structure of the high school. No matter how much they rebel, the teachers and principals remain in charge. Perhaps they want to create a persona, but other students tend to find their disruptions more annoying than tough. The hardest thing to understand about the rebels is that they only hurt themselves. Their behavior frequently leads to detentions and suspensions. They are often the ones who drop out of school.

In Psalm 2, we encounter the rebels in the biblical story. These are not immature teenagers. Rather, they are identified broadly as the nations and the peoples and narrowly as the leaders of those nations. Furthermore, they are not rebelling against teachers and principals but against God and His Anointed king. They aim to be taken seriously. Nevertheless, as we will see in Psalm 2, their rebellion against God will come to nothing. They will not be able to overthrow God or His Anointed king. They will not escape God’s wrath. Their only hope is to seek refuge in His Son.

Q: *Why does Psalm 2 use generalized terms to refer to the rebels?*

Q: *Why is there often a reciprocal relationship between the leaders of a nation and the people of that nation in the Bible?*

APPLICATION POINT – Most of us were not part of the rebel crew in high school, but we have all rebelled against God and His Anointed king. Sin is an attempt to usurp God’s authority and overthrow Him as the rightful ruler. It is rebellion against God. And we are all sinners. Thus, Psalm 2 is written to all of us. The question for us is whether we will remain in rebellion (v. 9) or become part of the Anointed king’s inheritance (v. 8)? The answer depends on whether we believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins and confess Him as Lord. Jesus is God’s Anointed king or Messiah (messiah means “anointed one” in Hebrew). Those who confess faith in Him are His inheritance. Everyone else is part of the rebellious plot against Him. They will be smashed like pottery on the day of God’s wrath.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Psalm 2 divides neatly into four parts. This lesson will explain the main idea of each part and identify an application from them. It will conclude with two reflections on Psalms to conclude the series.

1. CONSPIRING AND REBELLION
2. GOD'S RESPONSE
3. THE ANOINTED'S RESPONSE
4. ADMONISHMENT TO THE KINGS
5. CONCLUDING THE PSALMS

GOING DEEPER

+This section will follow the five points listed above and draw life applications from Psalm 2.

1. CONSPIRING AND REBELLION

■ PSALM 2:1-3

Q: *Why did the psalmist ask “why” at the beginning of Psalm 2? Was he seeking information?*

Q: *Why did the nations want to rebel against God?*

Psalm 2 begins by describing the rebellion of the nations. Their rebellion against God and His Anointed king sets the stage for everything that follows. The opening “why” is not so much a request for information as an expression of stunned disbelief, mocking scorn, or both. As relayed at the conclusion of verse 1, their rebellion was beyond explanation. It is in vain, bound to fail before it gains even the slightest traction.

The psalmist begins by describing this rebellion on a nation-wide scale. The nations and the peoples raged and plotted against God and the Anointed. In verse two, however, he narrows his focus to the kings and rulers. It is challenging to know exactly what the psalmist had in mind by doing this. He could be moving from general to specific, greater to lesser, or perhaps even lesser to greater. Whatever the case, this rebellion is comprehensive and larger than any one individual because it includes entire nations and peoples. The people are active participants, not passive pawns directed by an aristocracy. It is larger than any one person because the events described transcend any type of rebellion on a personal level. Major world forces were at work attempting to outmaneuver God and His Anointed.

The only words they are allotted in the psalm provide the only detail of their rebellion. They wanted to cast off the bonds God and His Anointed have used to constrain them. Sin is an attempt to usurp God's rightful rule. They see God's rule as a constraint and desire to be rid of it. This image of tearing off God's bonds is an apt description of any and all sin.

Q: *Do you think of Christianity as more constraining or more liberating?*

Q: *How have you witnessed the raging of those who oppose God turn out to be in vain?*

APPLICATION POINT – Christianity is often regarded as a restrictive list of dos and don'ts. Those who renounce their faith in Christ often describe their experience in terms remarkably similar to Psalm 2. They find jettisoning their commitment to Christ to be liberating. This outlook completely disregards the gospel. Christianity is not primarily a list of dos and don'ts but belief in what Christ has done for us.

Belief in the gospel does, however, coincide with a change in heart. In theological terms, this is known as regeneration. When our hearts become alive to Christ, we are able to pursue our greatest joy in Him. The rebels in Psalm 2 and those who deny Christ today have completely misunderstood the situation. They think they will be free if they get rid of God. Instead, their hearts remain dead. How can something be free if it is dead? Those who reject Christ are far more bound to sin than they realize. Furthermore, a regenerated heart is able to enjoy God's creation within the parameters He has set. That is true freedom. Those who reject Christ in pursuit of freedom are chasing an illusion. True freedom is not the ability to follow our desires without constraint. True freedom is only found in Christ.

2. GOD'S RESPONSE

PSALM 2:4-6

Q: *Why does God laugh at those who plot against Him?*

Q: *Where has God's king [verse 6] been mentioned previously in this psalm?*

The second part of Psalm 2 shows God's response to those who plot against Him and His Anointed. God did not initially respond in anger but with laughter. The creature's attempt to overthrow the Creator is laughable. The consequences are not. Just as God spoke creation into being, one angry word from Him creates terror in those who dare plot against Him. God is not concerned that their plot might succeed. They would not ascend God's holy hill and dethrone Him. Instead, God would set up His Anointed king on Zion, His holy hill. God is in complete control of the earth and those who dwell in it.

Q: *Do you ever despair over world events?*

Q: *How have you seen God's control revealed in both current events and world history?*

APPLICATION POINT – The nations can rage and plot against God all they want, but it will all come to nothing. No power can threaten God's reign over His creation. God never worries about anything. This should be of great comfort to us. We are easily shaken by events happening around us and around the world. Things happen that we don't expect. God is not like that. He is never threatened by hostile forces. He is never caught off guard. If we seek refuge in Him, we can live with confidence knowing the world is in His hands.

3. THE ANOINTED'S RESPONSE

PSALM 2:7-9

Q: *Who is speaking in verse 7? Who is speaking in verse 8?*

Q: *How is this passage connected to 2 Samuel 7:12-16?*

The contrast between the Anointed king and the kings of the nations could not be starker. They schemed and plotted against God. The Anointed king was seated on His throne by God. The nations rebelled against Him. The Anointed king recounted His statutes. The nations wanted to take from God. The Anointed king will ask of God and receive.

The sonship of the Anointed king links Psalm 2 to another important messianic text. In 2 Samuel 7:12-16, God revealed His commitment to David and to those who would follow in his line as king. As the events of the Old Testament unfold, however, it becomes clear that God's promises center on a specific descendant of David. There are even some hints of this development in 2 Samuel 7. For instance, 2 Samuel 7:13 says this individual's throne will be established forever. In what sense could this apply to Solomon or any of David's other near descendants? The New Testament identifies Jesus as this specific descendant who would fulfill the promises God made to David in 2 Samuel 7. The Anointed king announced that God had declared Him to be His Son (Psalm 2:7), creating a link between Psalm 2 and 2 Samuel 7:14, which says, "I [God] will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son." The Anointed king in Psalm 2 is the specific descendant of David anticipated in 2 Samuel 7.

God gave the nations to His Anointed king as an inheritance, the same nations that had been plotting against God and His Anointed. If they persisted in their plotting, they would suffer the wrath of God (Psalm 2:5) as mediated through the Anointed king (Psalm 2:9). If they gave up their plotting, they would take part in the Anointed's kingdom.

Q: *How does the promise for Jesus to inherit the nations appear in the New Testament, and what is the church's role in this promise?*

Q: *What does it matter if the Anointed king is begotten of God?*

APPLICATION POINT – The redemption of the nations is closely tied to the promises of God in the Old Testament. In Genesis 12:3, God promised that all the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham.

The Anointed king in Psalm 2 would receive the nations as an inheritance. These promises were eventually fulfilled in Jesus. The gospel provides hope for all the peoples of the earth. Jesus has given the church the task of sharing the gospel with the nations (Matthew 28:18–20). He uses us as the means by which He will secure His inheritance. Our calling as followers of the Anointed king is simple—to find refuge in Him and live on mission in the world.

4. ADMONISHMENT TO THE KINGS

■ PSALM 2:10–12

Q: *How could you rejoice with trembling?*

Q: *What does the kiss signal in verse 12?*

If the nations persisted in rebelling against God and His Anointed, they would suffer God’s wrath and be bashed with a rod of iron. But the nations had an opportunity to repent. The leaders were called to “be wise” and “be warned.” The same two Hebrew terms appear in Joshua 1:7. There they are translated as “turn” and “success.” The context of this passage is meditation on God’s law. Thus, it is possible that the two Hebrew verbs in Psalm 2:10 mean that the leaders had to learn and obey God’s law if they wished to avoid His wrath.

The command to kiss the Son means to submit to His authority. Those who do so will be spared from the way of destruction and able to seek refuge in Him. There is still time for those who wish to repent to serve God while trembling from how close they came to suffering His wrath.

Q: *What does God’s willingness to show grace to the kings who plotted against Him mean for you?*

Q: *How does submission to the Anointed king appear today?*

APPLICATION POINT: The application for this section could not be clearer. Submit to Jesus’s lordship! Unlike the nations in Psalm 2:1, rebellion does not always take the form of open defiance. Sometimes our rebellion can take far more subtle forms, such as neglect. Even Christians can inadvertently fall into times of deep rebellion if we neglect God’s Word and neglect speaking with Him in prayer.

5. CONCLUDING THE PSALMS

Q: *What similarities are there between Psalm 1 and 2?*

Q: *What is the significance of these similarities?*

We have not often considered the significance of how the psalms are arranged, but Psalms 1 and 2 contain a number of similarities that indicate that their placement may have been intentional. For starters, neither psalm contains a superscription. In Book 1 of the Psalter, only Psalms 10 and 33 also lack superscriptions. Psalm 1 begins by telling us how to be blessed (v. 1), and Psalm 2 ends by telling us how to be blessed (v. 12). In Psalm 1 we are told the blessed man avoids the way of sinners (v. 1). In Psalm 2, we are admonished to submit to the Son unless we perish in the way (v. 12). These references to “blessed” and “way” create an envelope effect around these two psalms. Furthermore, in Psalm 1, we are told to avoid the counsel of the wicked (v. 1). In Psalm 2, we see the peoples plotting evil together (v. 1). In Psalm 1, we are told the blessed man meditates on the law (v. 2). In Psalm 2, we see the peoples plotting (same Hebrew word translated “meditates” in Psalm 1:2) in vain. Psalm 1:6 says the way of the wicked will perish. Psalm 2:12 warns us against perishing in our way.

Q: *Why would these two psalms be linked so extensively?*

Q: *Why would they be placed at the beginning of the Psalter?*

APPLICATION POINT – Many scholars believe whoever organized the book of Psalms intended Psalms 1 and 2 to function as an introduction to the book. Almost every major theme can be located in Psalms 1–2. They clearly reveal the contrast between the ways of the wicked and the righteous. Psalm 1 highlights the importance of wisdom and God’s law. Psalm 2 introduces us to the nations, which are frequently the battleground in the Psalms.

You never can be certain if the nations will oppose God or be the means by which He demonstrates His glory. The appearance of the Messiah in Psalm 2 anticipates subsequent messianic psalms (Psalm 110). The imprecatory (judgment) psalms are also anticipated by the wrath of God and the bashing of those who plot against Him. One of the only major themes in the Psalms that does not clearly appear in Psalms 1 and 2 is confession, and you could argue it is implied if the nations would repent of their rebellion and submit to the Son (Psalm 2:10–12). If you want to understand the Psalms, start by looking deeply at Psalms 1 and 2 and allow them to guide you.

Q: *How do personal devotions help you take refuge in Christ?*

Q: *How have you witnessed personal devotion in the Psalms?*

This series has frequently mentioned Oakwood’s emphasis on personal devotions. The goal of personal devotions is to give yourself a constant reminder of the demand of the concluding line of Psalm 2. Personal devotions encourage you to take refuge in Christ. When you read the Bible devotionally, you are recognizing your need to take refuge in God through His Word. When you pray, you are recognizing God as the only true refuge you have. If you want to “take refuge in him,” you need to prioritize your personal devotional times. Personal devotions are not the only key to finding the blessedness described in the Psalter, but they are an irreplaceable spiritual discipline.

Q: *Have you ever been frustrated by not understanding something you read during a personal devotional time?*

Q: *Does fear of not understanding Scripture ever keep you from reading or studying the Bible?*

APPLICATION POINT – Psalm 2 concludes with a call to take refuge in the Anointed king. You do not always have to understand the Bible perfectly when you read it during a personal devotional time. Of course, you want to read with as much understanding as possible, but you are never going to fully understand every detail of God’s Word. You might not even understand most of it. That is okay. Part of what you are doing during your daily devotional is taking refuge in Jesus. The act of submitting daily to God’s Word can be as profitable as reading it with great understanding. Never let fear of not understanding God’s Word keep you from reading it.

NEXT STEPS

There are 150 Psalms. This series only looked at twenty-three of them, but you have probably begun to see how the Psalms can form your view of God and shape your relationship with Him. Write down three ways in which your understanding of God or His Word has been transformed during this series.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

-Father, forgive me for plotting against you. You are my God in heaven. You know all things. My rebellion against you is hopeless.

-Anointed king, I long for the day you return to receive Your inheritance. May it increase a thousandfold!

-Father, I thank you for your written Word. I can never understand it completely but encourage me to daily seek to engage you through it.

-God, I take refuge in you. You are my only hope of a blessed life.



DEVOTION IN THE PSALMS



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