



THE PSALMS
OF THE SONS OF
KORAH

NightChurch

2015

How to be in a small group

Another year, another Bible study group. Time to sign up, turn up and get things rolling for another year. Time also perhaps to ask some questions about your small group. Do you feel as if you just go along because that's what you're expected to do? Does the group have a clear purpose, or does it just exist because it has always existed?

More to the point, what part are you going to play in this year's group? What can you be doing to make the group a success? There are many books and guides and training materials for small group leaders (like *Growth Groups* from Matthias Media), but what about the humble group member? What can each of us be doing to make the most of our small groups?

Why go in the first place?

People go to small groups for all sorts of reasons to fulfil expectations, to make friends, to pursue romantic possibilities, to receive encouragement and counsel, to learn, and so on.

While most of these might be perfectly acceptable reasons to join a small group, the first and indispensable reason must be clear in our minds. Our primary reason for belonging to a small group is to give us opportunity to love and encourage other people in Christ. It's not about Me; it's about Them. And it's about Them because of Christ.

This after all is what the Christian life is about. Our most basic principle is to love other people as Christ has loved us, to lay down our lives for them as Christ did for us. This applies as much to small groups as it does to marriages, families, workplaces, and larger Christian meetings. We go to small groups not primarily to have our needs met, but to meet the needs of others. Of course, we have needs too, and no doubt they will be met along the way—but we can let others worry about that. In fact, paradoxically, the more we focus on loving others, and doing whatever we can for them, the more encouragement and strength we find ourselves.

There are many ways we can love and encourage the other people in our groups. Here are five powerful ones (complete with alliterative titles).

1. The power of presence

This is the simplest and most obvious, but is no less powerful for being so. Just being there each week without fail is a powerful encouragement to the other members of the group. In making the group time a solid commitment, to be missed only in times of emergency, you send a very clear message to the other members: "Being with you matters very much to me. Unless something very important comes up, you can expect me. Encouraging you is a top priority."

Conversely, inconsistent attendance sends a somewhat less encouraging message: "I don't mind coming, but it's not that important. If I feel a bit tired or something else crops up, don't expect me. Being with you and encouraging you isn't really a very high priority for me."

Turning up regularly requires no extraordinary gifts or talent, but it is a powerful way of loving other people.

2. The power of preparation

Most small groups complete their evening's Bible study with a plaintive plea from the leader for people to read the passage and prepare for next week's study. The leader knows full well that most people won't, but there's no harm in trying!

However, preparing for the group time is another powerful way to love the members of the group. Of course, having read the

passage, or done the homework, greatly increases the benefit you yourself receive from the discussion. More importantly, however, it equips you to encourage others by what you say. Rather than throwing in whatever occurs to you at the time, you have actually thought about the Bible passage and the issues that it raises. You are much better prepared to say things that stimulate and encourage and teach others if you have bothered to give it some thought beforehand.

3. The power of prayer

Paul's friend and fellow worker, Epaphras, would have made an ideal small group member. According to Paul, he was always "wrestling in prayer" for the Colossians, that they might "stand firm in all the will of God". Paul was able to vouch that in doing so, Epaphras was "working hard for you" (Col 4:12-13).

Praying for others is hard work, but real work. It is one of the most loving things we can do for our fellow group members, not only because it is through our prayers that God does his work in people's lives, but because it is such a quiet, inconspicuous form of ministry. Making a casserole for someone, by comparison, is much more satisfying—you see something very tangible for your efforts, and you have the pleasure of delivering it to the person and receiving their warm expressions of thanks. Prayer has none of those rewards. You do it for one reason only: that you care for that person and want what is best for them in Christ. And so you pray for them.

4. The power of personality

The alliteration may be starting to stretch a little thin here, but the point is solid enough—that a powerful way of loving others in your small group is to be willing to share your own life and personality with them.

This is by no means an easy thing to do. Many of us would much rather keep quiet and not give too much away. However, by opening up and sharing our lives and thoughts and struggles and joys, we do others a great service. We not only show them that we have the very same struggles that they have (but thought they were alone in suffering); we also encourage them to open up as well.

Of course, it is anything but loving to indiscriminately dump everything we are thinking or feeling onto the group. We need to heed the advice of Proverbs and think carefully before we speak; as well as the words of Ephesians 4: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Eph 4:29).

5. The power of love

Whatever you do in the group—every word you say, every action—do it for the sake of others. Look for how you can support and help the leader. Look for ways to care for the members of the group—those who could really do with a phone call or visit; those who would benefit from having someone to pray or read the Bible with; those who need financial or other material help; those who just need a friend to have pizza and a video with.

Belonging to a small group can be a very demanding exercise. It can cost us our lives, because that is what it means to be a follower of Christ—to lay down our lives for the sake of others. If we grasp the possibilities, small groups represent an enormously fruitful opportunity for doing just that.



Introduction to the Psalms of the Sons of Korah

The Psalms are a book of Israel's prayer and praise. They're also a snapshot of God's revelation to Israel and Israel's response in faith to the Lord. The Psalms are a picture of the faith of Israel. As we read them we see how God's people related to him 2,500 years ago.

The Greek word *psalmos* is a translation of the Hebrew word *mizmor*, meaning song, which is found in many of the Psalm titles. Yet the Psalms are made up of songs, prayers, cries for help, laments and poems. Some psalms were used privately, others corporately, and still others in specific situations such as on holy days or journeys or after a victory or the crowning of a king.

While king David is the most famous author of the Psalms (he wrote over 70 of them), many are written by others. The Sons of Korah were descendants of Kohath, the son of Levi, and they served in the temple as musicians (see 1st Chronicles 6.22 & 31). Because their job was probably passed down through the generations, and the psalms they wrote which are included in the Psalter may have been written as early as the time of David and Solomon (the 10th century B.C.), as late as post-exile (5th century B.C.), or anywhere in between. While each psalm may have been written by an individual they were often used corporately, to express the voice of all of Israel.

As you read these psalms, let the poetry bring God's relationship with you into sharp focus. As with all Scripture, the psalms lead us to Christ. After keeping the original context in mind, ask whether each psalm make sense as either sung to Christ, or sung by Christ. This helps us see how the psalms can be our songs too, because we are united to Christ by faith.

The psalms are intensely relational. They explore the depths of our hearts and dark corners of our lives to show us who we are and what is in us—guilt, anger, salvation, praise—before the God who loves, judges, and saves us in Jesus Christ.

1 The preparation questions in these studies are adapted from *One-to-One Bible reading*, by David Helm.

Prepare 1; Psalm 42-43

- Complete this page of preparation **before** you meet at Small Group.

Reading the passage before Small Group greatly increases the benefit you receive from the discussion. But it's also a powerful way to love the others in your group as you share what you have discovered.

- Pray and read Psalm 42-43 (note: Psalm 42 & 43 are best read as one psalm)

Remember that the psalms are intensely relational. Try hard to feel them as you read them.

Are there are repeated words, phrases, or ideas? If so, what point is being made?

Note the affective quality of the psalm—it's mood, emotion, energy, vibe, language. How do you think the author felt as he wrote this psalm? What feeling is he trying to convey?

What images or metaphors does the author use? What do they show us about God or people?

What does the passage teach us about God, his people, and life in his world?

Does this psalm point forward to Jesus? Is the gospel anticipated or foreshadowed or longed for in some way?

Study 1; Psalm 42-43

So Unsatisfied!

Do you ever go through periods of feeling unsatisfied with life? How do you describe that feeling?

Read Psalm 42.1-4

How does the psalmist use the metaphor of thirst?

Have you ever longed for God in the depths of your being in the way the psalmist does?

What are you tempted to turn to when God feels far away?

Read Psalm 42.6b-10

What does the psalmist remind himself of?

How does the water metaphor build and change?

Are there times in your life when it is bitter-sweet to remember God's promises? Why is it worth it anyway?

Read Psalm 43.1-4

What is the psalmist's request (verse 1, 3)?

Read John 1.1-18. How does God meet the psalmist's longing?

Read Psalm 43.5

This 'chorus' has appeared three times now in this psalm. What is the psalmist's strategy when his soul is downcast?

What might this strategy look like for you practically?

When you feel dry – as if God is distant – do you slip away from God's Word and God's people, or do you realise that is when you need them more than ever?

Pray

What would God want you to pray about after reading this psalm?

What can you pray for each other at Small Group?

What can you pray for our church?

What can you pray for all those outside our church?

Prepare 2; Psalm 44

- Complete this page of preparation **before** you meet at Small Group.

Reading the passage before Small Group greatly increases the benefit you receive from the discussion. But it's also a powerful way to love the others in your group as you share what you have discovered.

- Pray and read Psalm 44

Remember that the psalms are intensely relational. Try hard to feel them as you read them.

Are there are repeated words, phrases, or ideas? If so, what point is being made?

Note the affective quality of the psalm—it's mood, emotion, energy, vibe, language. How do you think the author felt as he wrote this psalm? What feeling is he trying to convey?

What images or metaphors does the author use? What do they show us about God or people?

What does the passage teach us about God, his people, and life in his world?

Does this psalm point forward to Jesus? Is the gospel anticipated or foreshadowed or longed for in some way?

Study 2; Psalm 44

God, how could you!

Have you ever been angry at God? Have you ever despaired at God's silence? Are there times you feel like God has let you down?

Read Psalm 44.1-8

What type of God has the psalmist (and all of Israel) been told about (1-3)?

How would you describe the psalmist's relationship with God (4-8)?

Up until verse 9, the relationship between the psalmist and God appears positively peachy! But the reflections of the past are about to be shattered by the reality of the present...

Read Psalm 44.9-16

What charges does the psalmist bring against God (9-14, note how each verse starts with an accusatory '*You...*')?

How do these charges compare with what the psalmist knows about God (in 1-8)? Where does this leave the psalmist (15-16)?

Do you ever feel like the God described in the bible (good, gracious, loving, powerful) is a very different God to the one you experience in life?

Read Psalm 44.17-22

How does the mood change again?

Read Psalm 44.23-26

The psalm ends with a plea, as Israel throw themselves on God, appealing to his unfailing love. What do they ask of God?

Paul quotes this psalm in Romans. Read Romans 8.31-39. In what ways does Paul draw the same conclusions as the psalmist?

How is our knowledge of God's goodness different to that of the psalmist (compare 1-8 with Romans 8.32)?

Think of a time when it seemed God was against you rather than for you. How did your experience compare with the experiences described in this psalm? How will what you've considered here change your relationship with God next time you feel this way?

Pray

What would God want you to pray about after reading this psalm?

What can you pray for each other at Small Group?

What can you pray for our church?

What can you pray for all those outside our church?

Prepare 3; Psalm 45

- Complete this page of preparation **before** you meet at Small Group.

Reading the passage before Small Group greatly increases the benefit you receive from the discussion. But it's also a powerful way to love the others in your group as you share what you have discovered.

- Pray and read Psalm 45

Remember that the psalms are intensely relational. Try hard to feel them as you read them.

Are there are repeated words, phrases, or ideas? If so, what point is being made?

Note the affective quality of the psalm—it's mood, emotion, energy, vibe, language. How do you think the author felt as he wrote this psalm? What feeling is he trying to convey?

What images or metaphors does the author use? What do they show us about God or people?

What does the passage teach us about God, his people, and life in his world?

Does this psalm point forward to Jesus? Is the gospel anticipated or foreshadowed or longed for in some way?

Study 3; Psalm 45

The King & His Bride

This psalm is a song for the wedding of a king (one of king David's descendants). Describe the excitement of a wedding day from the point of view of the groom, the bride, the best man, the maid of honour, and the guests.

The psalmist directly addresses the king in his introduction (1) and his conclusion (16-17). What do his words reveal about what he thinks of this king and this wedding?

Read Psalm 45.1-9

What kind of king is this king of Israel (2-7)?

What kind of wedding is about to take place (8-9)?

The psalmist knows that as a descendent of David, this king has been anointed by God to shepherd his people. How do you think the psalmist's expectations colour this psalm? How does the psalmist encourage the king to live up to the expectations that come with his position?

Hebrews quotes this psalm. Read Hebrews 1.8-9. What does this tell us about Jesus?

Read Psalm 45.10-17

What wise words does the psalmist offer the bride on her wedding day (10-12)? Does this advice reflect God's pattern for marriage (Genesis 2.24)?

What is the feeling that surrounds her as she 'walks down the aisle' on her wedding day?

The bible describes the church as Christ's bride (Ephesians 5.22-23). What are the benefits for us as we submit to Christ in marriage?

Does your heart 'overflow with a pleasing theme' (1, ESV) when you think about the marriage of Christ and his church?

Spend some time re-reading the description of the king/bridegroom (2-7). How do these words describe Jesus now?

Pray

What would God want you to pray about after reading this psalm?

What can you pray for each other at Small Group?

What can you pray for our church?

What can you pray for all those outside our church?

Prepare 4; Psalm 46

- Complete this page of preparation **before** you meet at Small Group.

Reading the passage before Small Group greatly increases the benefit you receive from the discussion. But it's also a powerful way to love the others in your group as you share what you have discovered.

- Pray and read Psalm 46

Remember that the psalms are intensely relational. Try hard to feel them as you read them.

Are there are repeated words, phrases, or ideas? If so, what point is being made?

Note the affective quality of the psalm—it's mood, emotion, energy, vibe, language. How do you think the author felt as he wrote this psalm? What feeling is he trying to convey?

What images or metaphors does the author use? What do they show us about God or people?

What does the passage teach us about God, his people, and life in his world?

Does this psalm point forward to Jesus? Is the gospel anticipated or foreshadowed or longed for in some way?

Study 4; Psalm 46

The One Still Point in a Tumultuous World

If you are prone to motion sickness you will know that fixing your eyes on the horizon can help, giving you a fixed point of reference while the vehicle you are in shudders and shakes and rolls (along with your stomach!). In Psalm 46 God calls us to fix our eyes on him, especially when life tosses us about and troubles and anxieties make us want to curl up in the foetal position...

Read Psalm 46.1-3

What images of a world falling apart are in these verses?

In what ways do these metaphors describe the instabilities and fears you face in life?

How is God contrasted with the world?

Read Psalm 46.4-7

Where is the river, and how is it different to the water in verses 2-3?

Describe the City of God. Why is this city solid, when all the rest of the earth melts?

Read Psalm 46.8-11

The psalmist calls God *The LORD of Hosts* (7 & 11, ESV). This label means God is the commander of all the armies of earth and of heaven. What does God do with this power?

Check out Mark 4.35-41. What is the answer to the disciples' question in verse 41?

Make a list of all the things that are making you anxious, making you fearful, threatening your security, or pulling you under at the moment.

List some of the practical things you can do to 'be still' and fix your eyes on the one unbreakable fortress (Jesus your king and saviour) in this life.

How will doing these things help us weather the storms of life?

Get in pairs. Share with each other one of the 'storms' in your life, and one way you can find stability in Jesus. Spend five minutes praying for each other.

Pray

What would God want you to pray about after reading this psalm?

What can you pray for each other at Small Group?

What can you pray for our church?

What can you pray for all those outside our church?

Prepare 5; Psalm 47

- Complete this page of preparation **before** you meet at Small Group.

Reading the passage before Small Group greatly increases the benefit you receive from the discussion. But it's also a powerful way to love the others in your group as you share what you have discovered.

- Pray and read Psalm 47

Remember that the psalms are intensely relational. Try hard to feel them as you read them.

Are there are repeated words, phrases, or ideas? If so, what point is being made?

Note the affective quality of the psalm—it's mood, emotion, energy, vibe, language. How do you think the author felt as he wrote this psalm? What feeling is he trying to convey?

What images or metaphors does the author use? What do they show us about God or people?

What does the passage teach us about God, his people, and life in his world?

Does this psalm point forward to Jesus? Is the gospel anticipated or foreshadowed or longed for in some way?

Study 5; Psalm 47

Join Our Joy!

Make a simple list of things that bring you joy, and the reasons why they do. How do you express that joy?

Read Psalm 47

Why does the psalmist want us to clap our hands and shout to God in joy (1-2)?

Why does the psalmist want us sing praises to God our king (6-7)?

What three things has God done for the nation of Israel (3-4)?

How does this psalm describe God in verses 5 and 8?

God is *Yahweh Most High*, he's the *Great King* of *all* the earth. Verse 3 and 4 recall Israel's history—how God defeated her enemies, drove them out of the Promised Land (Canaan) and give that land to Israel as an inheritance, because of his great love for her. That gives Israel great reasons to praise God! But there are even greater, more amazing reasons to shout for joy still to come...

What is being described in verse 9?

Read Genesis 12.1-3 and Galatians 3.7-9. How does this psalm fit in with this big picture of God's story of salvation? Where do you fit in?

- Describe how God has loved you by choosing you.

- Describe how God has loved you by subduing your greatest enemy.

If you addressed this psalm as a song or prayer to Christ, would that be an accurate picture of your joy as one of his followers?

All people will one day acknowledge God as king. Either begrudgingly or – and this is by far the better option according to this psalm! – freely. Think about how you can share with non-Christians the great joy they could have if they join with you in exalting God.

Pray

What would God want you to pray about after reading this psalm?

What can you pray for each other at Small Group?

What can you pray for our church?

What can you pray for all those outside our church?

Prepare 6; Psalm 48

- Complete this page of preparation **before** you meet at Small Group.

Reading the passage before Small Group greatly increases the benefit you receive from the discussion. But it's also a powerful way to love the others in your group as you share what you have discovered.

- Pray and read Psalm 48

Remember that the psalms are intensely relational. Try hard to feel them as you read them.

Are there are repeated words, phrases, or ideas? If so, what point is being made?

Note the affective quality of the psalm—it's mood, emotion, energy, vibe, language. How do you think the author felt as he wrote this psalm? What feeling is he trying to convey?

What images or metaphors does the author use? What do they show us about God or people?

What does the passage teach us about God, his people, and life in his world?

Does this psalm point forward to Jesus? Is the gospel anticipated or foreshadowed or longed for in some way?

Study 6; Psalm 48

Our God and His City

Do you ever wish Christ and his church were more impressive to people around you? If so, why?

Read Psalm 48.1-3

Zion is another name for the city of Jerusalem. What is the relationship between God and Zion?



Jerusalem by Berthold Werner. Licensed under Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jerusalem_BW_1.JPG#/media/File:Jerusalem_BW_1.JPG

Here's a picture of Mount Zion. The buildings probably looked a little different back in the psalmist's day. But as you can see it's more a gentle hill than a mountain. So why does the psalmist describe it as *beautiful in its loftiness*? How can it be called holy? Or the joy of the whole earth?

Read Psalm 48.4-11

Compare what the City of God is to God's enemies (4-8) against what she is to God's people (9-11).

Here's some fun puns by the psalmist: *Zaphon* means north (verse 2; there's probably a footnote to that effect in your bible). East is mentioned in verse 7. The word for south is also the word for *right hand* (verse 10), because the points of the compass were measured by facing east, so south was to your right. As you face east, the person next in line behind you is to your west. The word *next* in verse 13 is the same word for west. There's nothing especially significant about this—the psalmist is just being poetic! But it does segue in to the next question, because Revelation chapter 21 also talks about the north, south, east, and west when it talks about Jerusalem. But Revelation talks about a **new** Jerusalem...

Read Revelation 21.9-26

How is this the description of this new Jerusalem similar to Psalm 48? How is it different?

Read Psalm 48.12-14

If we consider God's church from a human perspective, she seems quite unimpressive. Certainly unimpressive enough that many will gather to attack her! In light of Revelation 21, what is the psalmist's invitation to us (12-14)?

How would you describe the joy of having God dwell in you? Take a couple of minutes to write down some thoughts. And feel free to be poetic—we are reading the Psalms! How can you share that joy with 'the next generation'?

Pray

What would God want you to pray about after reading this psalm?

What can you pray for each other at Small Group?

What can you pray for our church?

What can you pray for all those outside our church?

Prepare 7; Psalm 49

- Complete this page of preparation **before** you meet at Small Group.

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- Pray and read Psalm 49

Remember that the psalms are intensely relational. Try hard to feel them as you read them.

Are there are repeated words, phrases, or ideas? If so, what point is being made?

Note the affective quality of the psalm—it's mood, emotion, energy, vibe, language. How do you think the author felt as he wrote this psalm? What feeling is he trying to convey?

What images or metaphors does the author use? What do they show us about God or people?

What does the passage teach us about God, his people, and life in his world?

Does this psalm point forward to Jesus? Is the gospel anticipated or foreshadowed or longed for in some way?

Study 7; Psalm 49

The Rhetoric of Riches

Are you rich?

Read Psalm 49.1-4

The psalmist is about to lay down some wisdom. Who does he invite to listen?

Read Psalm 49.5-6

How does wealth provide comfort and security?

How do you see those who are poorer haunted by the power, influence, and wealth of the rich?

Read Psalm 49.7-12

What can riches never buy you?

Read Psalm 49.13-15

How does the psalmist say the rich are treated (see also verse 18)? Is this true today?

Read Psalm 49.15-20

The price may be too high for us, but is it too high for God?

This psalm begins with a question—*why fear the rich?* But it is a rhetorical question. How does the psalmist answer his own question?

How should our attitude to wealth, money, and *stuff* be different to the world's?

Think of some of the specific ways you are tempted to believe the *rhetoric of riches*—the message that wealth, power, and influence will bring you acceptance (13) and comfort (18), and the message that this is enough.

How could you help each other in your Small Group to have a godly attitude to wealth? How can you engage with non-Christians about the ultimate worth of riches?

Riches aren't inherently bad, but we also need understanding (20). What is this understanding, and where do we get it?

Pray

What would God want you to pray about after reading this psalm?

What can you pray for each other at Small Group?

What can you pray for our church?

What can you pray for all those outside our church?

Prepare 8; Psalm 84

- Complete this page of preparation **before** you meet at Small Group.

Reading the passage before Small Group greatly increases the benefit you receive from the discussion. But it's also a powerful way to love the others in your group as you share what you have discovered.

- Pray and read Psalm 84

Remember that the psalms are intensely relational. Try hard to feel them as you read them.

Are there are repeated words, phrases, or ideas? If so, what point is being made?

Note the affective quality of the psalm—it's mood, emotion, energy, vibe, language. How do you think the author felt as he wrote this psalm? What feeling is he trying to convey?

What images or metaphors does the author use? What do they show us about God or people?

What does the passage teach us about God, his people, and life in his world?

Does this psalm point forward to Jesus? Is the gospel anticipated or foreshadowed or longed for in some way?

Study 8; Psalm 84

A Desperate Journey

Which do you enjoy more—the destination or the journey?

Read Psalm 84.1-4

Where is Yahweh's dwelling place, the place the psalmist is talking about (1)?

Describe the psalmist's feelings toward this place and the pictures the psalmist uses to describe his feelings.

Read Psalm 84.5-7

The psalmist is *so desperate* to journey to the place God dwells that he even daydreams about it (5)! But journeys through desolate places (like the Valley of Baca) to Jerusalem to worship God at the temple were real events for the people of Israel. So what is so unusual about the psalmist's description of the journey?

Why do you think the psalmist longs for God's dwelling place like this? Do you long to be where God is like this?

Read Psalm 84.8-12

Is the psalmist 'just being poetic' in verse 10?

Why is being where God is so good?

The Bible is the story of a journey. A desperate journey, born out of a desperate love, and a desperate longing. Read Matthew 1.23 and Luke 1.68-70. Who took this journey?

Keeping in mind that the fullness of God dwells in Christ, and Christ dwells in us through his Holy Spirit, read through this psalm again. We have what the psalmist longed for! How great is our joy now that God dwells in us?

What are some of the good things (10-11) God gives you?

The Christian life is sometimes described as a journey. What does this psalm tell us about our journey?

Do you feel 'at home' in Christ and in his church? Why, or why not?

Pray

What would God want you to pray about after reading this psalm?

What can you pray for each other at Small Group?

What can you pray for our church?

What can you pray for all those outside our church?

Prepare 9; Psalm 85

- Complete this page of preparation **before** you meet at Small Group.

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- Pray and read Psalm 85

Remember that the psalms are intensely relational. Try hard to feel them as you read them.

Are there are repeated words, phrases, or ideas? If so, what point is being made?

Note the affective quality of the psalm—it's mood, emotion, energy, vibe, language. How do you think the author felt as he wrote this psalm? What feeling is he trying to convey?

What images or metaphors does the author use? What do they show us about God or people?

What does the passage teach us about God, his people, and life in his world?

Does this psalm point forward to Jesus? Is the gospel anticipated or foreshadowed or longed for in some way?

Study 9; Psalm 85

Salvation is Near!

How do your circumstances effect how close to God you feel?

Read Psalm 85.1-3

Think over what you remember of the history of God's people in the Old Testament. What events might these verses be referring to? If you have a bible with extra notes and historical timelines, this might be one time it's worth having a look!

What do these events show us about what God is like?

Are you able to describe God's action in your life in a similar way?

The story of God's action in a Christian's life usually called a *testimony*. Like most stories, there's probably two-minute version, and a detailed version, maybe even a version that takes years to tell in the course of your life lived alongside those close to you. Why do you think knowing this story was important to the psalmist? Why is knowing this story important for you?

Read Psalm 85.4-7

Do your prayers reflect the psalmist's prayer? What does your answer reveal about what you believe God is like? What does it reveal about what you think the world is like?

When we pray that God would turn away his anger and show grace and kindness to this world, and when we pray for mercy, and restoration, and for God's unfailing love to be poured on us, it reveals that in our hearts we know that God is a God who loves to forgive and a God who delights in bringing salvation. How can you build the habit of praying the way the psalmist does?

Read Psalm 85.8-9

The psalmist longs to hear God's words that bring peace and salvation. What does Hebrews 1.1-4 say about God's answer to the psalmist's request?

Read Psalm 85.10-13

How does the psalmist describe what we hope for? How does this picture reflect God?

Sometimes we focus on our own guilt and inadequacy before God and we forget that salvation is near—we forget what God is like, and we forget the hope we have. But God delights in forgiving sin and turning away his anger! What can we do to remember God's character?

Pray

What would God want you to pray about after reading this psalm?

What can you pray for each other at Small Group?

What can you pray for our church?

What can you pray for all those outside our church?

Prepare 10; Psalm 87

- Complete this page of preparation **before** you meet at Small Group.

Reading the passage before Small Group greatly increases the benefit you receive from the discussion. But it's also a powerful way to love the others in your group as you share what you have discovered.

- Pray and read Psalm 87

Remember that the psalms are intensely relational. Try hard to feel them as you read them.

Are there are repeated words, phrases, or ideas? If so, what point is being made?

Note the affective quality of the psalm—it's mood, emotion, energy, vibe, language. How do you think the author felt as he wrote this psalm? What feeling is he trying to convey?

What images or metaphors does the author use? What do they show us about God or people?

What does the passage teach us about God, his people, and life in his world?

Does this psalm point forward to Jesus? Is the gospel anticipated or foreshadowed or longed for in some way?

Study 10; Psalm 87

Born in Zion

How might life be different if you were a native citizen of a different county or culture?

Read Psalm 87.1-3

Why is Zion (Jerusalem, remember Psalm 48) holy? Why are glorious things said of this city?

In the time of the psalmist, Jerusalem was the place God called his people to meet him, to hear him, and to worship him. Where do we meet, hear, and worship God now?

Read Psalm 87.4-7

Egypt (Rahab refers to Egypt, see Isaiah 30.7) was Israel's first great enemy. Babylon was her last great enemy, Philistia was a constant thorn in the flesh. Tyre was proudly independent, and Cush, for all intents and purposes, was at the opposite end of the earth. So what is so surprising about what the psalmist says about these nations?

Read the following verses and discuss how they relate to Psalm 87.

John 17.3

Philippians 3.20

John 3.3

Hebrews 11.10

Most of us aren't Israelites. So how have we become citizens of God's city?

What is so good about living in a city whose designer and builder is God?

The word *said* in verse 3 could also be translated *sung*. Are you so inspired by the love of God for his son Jesus Christ – so inspired by your citizenship in Christ – that you sing of his glory?

What does it mean to be born again as a citizen of Christ and his kingdom? Think about the week ahead—will you live like a native citizen of Jesus' kingdom?

As someone saved by grace, what attitude should characterise your heart (3, 7)?

Pray

What would God want you to pray about after reading this psalm?

What can you pray for each other at Small Group?

What can you pray for our church?

What can you pray for all those outside our church?

Prepare 11; Psalm 88

- Complete this page of preparation **before** you meet at Small Group.

Reading the passage before Small Group greatly increases the benefit you receive from the discussion. But it's also a powerful way to love the others in your group as you share what you have discovered.

- Pray and read Psalm 88

Remember that the psalms are intensely relational. Try hard to feel them as you read them.

Are there are repeated words, phrases, or ideas? If so, what point is being made?

Note the affective quality of the psalm—it's mood, emotion, energy, vibe, language. How do you think the author felt as he wrote this psalm? What feeling is he trying to convey?

What images or metaphors does the author use? What do they show us about God or people?

What does the passage teach us about God, his people, and life in his world?

Does this psalm point forward to Jesus? Is the gospel anticipated or foreshadowed or longed for in some way?

Study 11; Psalm 88

The Walking Dead

What metaphors do people use to describe despair?

Read Psalm 88

How does the psalm make you feel?

How do you think the psalmist felt? What are two themes that summarise the focus of this psalm?

What hints are there in the psalm about the possible circumstances of the psalmist?

What anxiety do verses 13-14 reveal in the psalmist's faith?

Have there been times in your life (maybe even right now?) when this psalm could sum up your pain?

The psalmist blames God for his situation. What does he say God has done (6-8 & 14-18)?

The psalmist also prays to God. How does he describe his prayers (1-2, 9, & 13)?

This psalm has traditionally been read in churches on Good Friday. Why do you think this is?

Read Matthew 26.36-39. Could Jesus have prayed Psalm 88 in Gethsemane?

Who wins in this psalm—faith or despair?

What does it mean to have faith in times of suffering?

What does this psalm show about the psalmist's relationship with God? Could the same thing be said about your relationship with God?

How can this psalm help you to be vulnerable before God in prayer?

Pray

What would God want you to pray about after reading this psalm?

What can you pray for each other at Small Group?

What can you pray for our church?

What can you pray for all those outside our church?