

BE STILL AND KNOW

BEHOLDING GOD IN THE PSALMS

BY APRILE SWEERS

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INTRODUCTION

Before you dig in to the first week of homework, take a look at what God has to say about the importance of knowing Him:

Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, ***that he understands and knows Me***, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD. Jeremiah 9:23, 24 (emphasis added)

God delights in His own perfect character, and He has wired us so that our joy – that deep-down wellspring of contentment that lasts and lasts no matter what our circumstances – is entirely bound up in delighting in His perfect character as well. When I was a junior in high school, my mom placed a copy of A.W. Tozer's *The Knowledge of the Holy* in my hands. It was my first formal book-study of the attributes of God and it was transforming. The line in that book I will never ever forget is this: ***What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.*** Tozer goes on to write:

For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most significant fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like...Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, "What comes into your mind when you think about God?" we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man.¹ (emphasis added)

Whoa. Read that again and let it really sink in. The most important thing about you isn't your education, family background, current occupation, whether you work outside the home or not, how many kids you have or don't have, whether you're married or used to be married, how many Bible verses you know, what size you wear, how regularly you attend church, how your kids behave, where you live, how much income you netted last year, how involved you are in social justice causes...the list could go on and on. *The single most important thing about you - the most significant predictor of your of your spiritual future - is your knowledge of God.* Not a cold,

sterile, textbook knowledge, but rather a relational, experiential knowledge that is deeply rooted in the truth of the Bible but brought to life and continually fueled into fiery passion by the Spirit.

That's why we're here. That is why we are about to devote several weeks to a verse-by-verse study of nine carefully selected Psalms that clearly reveal so many mind-renewing, life-transforming aspects of who God is, how He works, what He desires, and how He created us to experience a fountain of lasting joy and soul-satisfaction in Him. ONLY in Him.

We love the Psalms for how they capture the human experience. I can't even count how many times I have sat in front of my Bible with a heart and mind ravaged by fear or depression or doubt – sometimes a terrible, soul-crushing mixture of all three. I haven't had the energy or desire to read a story from an Old Testament narrative or instruction from a New Testament epistle. But there's just something about the Psalms. No matter how bad life gets, no matter how discouraged I feel, I can always read a Psalm. I guess that's because the Psalms are so real, so true-to-life. They put our haunting emotions into words. "Yes, that's EXACTLY how I feel too!" is a common and incredibly consoling thought that often crosses my mind when reading the Psalms. They express our doubts and anxieties, and yet they never leave us wallowing in them. As unapologetically honest as the Psalmists are, they ultimately point us *away from* the harsh realities of life in a fallen world and *to* the refreshing hope we have in God and His gospel. That's because as beautifully as the Psalms capture the human experience, they are first and foremost about God Himself. As we make *Him* our priority as we study by continually asking, "What does this Psalm teach me about God?," we will end up learning all the things we need to learn about ourselves. *Everything the Bible has to say about who we are and what we are supposed to do, it says through the lens of who God is.*

That is why today, over 20 years since my mom placed Tozer's book in my hand, I am still convinced – yet even more so - that he was right about spiritual growth and wellbeing. *It all hinges on our knowledge of God.* With that reality at the forefront of our minds, "let us press on to know the Lord" (Hosea 6:3).

WEEK 1

Behold, O Lord, You Know It All

Psalm 139

The most well-known, highly lauded, and often quoted part of Psalm 139 is the part about us. It is here in this beloved Psalm that we learn we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” God Himself wove us together in our mothers’ wombs! Before we were even born, all the days ordained for us were already accounted for by God Himself! I vividly remember turning to this Psalm again and again during my teenage years which were riddled with self-doubt, low self-esteem, and an overall sense of insignificance. Verses 13-16 were my go-to reminders that God saw me and cared about me, and that my life did indeed matter to Him. It’s harrowing to think of where my insecurities would have taken me had God’s Word, this Psalm in particular, not been an ever-present shield around my mind and heart. To God be the glory!

When I was in college I heard a sermon on Psalm 139 that opened my eyes for the first time to the real focus of this chapter. Here’s a clue: *It wasn’t me*. Yes, I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Yes, that truth probably saved my life. But that sermon was on the attributes of God. Specifically, His omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, sovereignty, and holiness. THAT is what Psalm 139 is really about. When a God-focused reading of Psalm 139 finally clicked in my brain, I realized how profound the verses about me really are. You see, I’m not just fearfully and wonderfully made by some vaguely identifiable “man upstairs.” I am fearfully and wonderfully made by a personal, loving, self-revealing God who is all-knowing, all-seeing, all-powerful, ever-present, and reigning sovereignly over all things! So are you!

Before we dig in, let me give you a brief introduction into the format of this workbook. First, be comforted in knowing that Bible study is not nearly as complicated as we sometimes make it. It essentially consists of four things:

- 1) **Reading** (Ask: What does it say?) This seems so obvious, but it’s often where we get lazy. Reading carefully and repetitively is the foundation. If we don’t take this step seriously, we are very vulnerable to error in all the other steps.

- 2) **Observing** (Ask: What do I see?) You're looking to nail down the basic who, what, when, where, and why stuff. It's all there in the text, you just have to intentionally seek it out.
- 3) **Interpreting** (Ask: What does it mean?) It's time to dig below the surface and pull out the key truths being conveyed by the author to his audience. This is where knowledge of historical context, language, grammar, cross-references, etc. is important. A simple Bible concordance and/or study Bible as well as a good commentary or two can be really helpful here. My teaching each week will focus heavily on this step.
- 4) **Applying** (Ask: How does it work in my life?) This is where you get personal. How is the truth revealed supposed to affect your life today?

Read, observe, interpret, apply – that's it! That's the sum total of every good Bible study (and the format we are going to follow here). You don't need a fancy workbook written by a famous Christian speaker or a vast theological library (though I sure would like one!). You just need a copy of the passage you're studying, a pen, maybe a colored pencil or two, and a Spirit-fueled desire to love the Lord your God *with all your mind!* Because simple doesn't mean easy. Effective Bible study is hard work, but it's the most worthwhile work you'll ever do.

One more thing – one of the greatest Bible study tools God has given us is our local church community. Studying the Bible with other believers helps us see things in the text that we may not otherwise see, protects us from error, and motivates us to follow-through in applying the truths to our everyday lives. By working through these questions on your own, you have something really important to offer the women you will hopefully gather with each week. And they have something important to offer you. Share. Ask questions. Answer questions. Receive instruction. Laugh. Cry. Pray these truths over each other. I wholeheartedly believe that we study best when we study *together!*

Day 1 - READ: What does it say?

- Read Psalm 139 in the Bible you most often use for study. Read it out loud if you can!
- Read Psalm 139 in one or two other translations. The YouVersion Bible app makes this very easy! Biblegateway.com is another free resource for accessing various Bible translations. The NIV, ESV, NASB, and the HCSB are my favorites. The Amplified Bible (AMP) translation is another good one to reference.
- If time permits, read a modern paraphrase of Psalm 139 such as *The Message*. You can access *The Message* for free on your YouVersion phone app or biblegateway.com.
- If possible, use the audio function of your YouVersion Bible app to *listen* to Psalm 139 being read in your favorite translation.

Day 2 - OBSERVE: What do I see?

Mark up the text below as follows:

- Use a **RED** pen or colored pencil to circle or underline any characteristics, attributes, actions, or names of God.
- Use a **GREEN** pen or colored pencil to underline any commands in the Psalm.
- Use any color you want to circle or underline any key words and/or phrases. Look for repetition.
- Put a question mark next to any verse, phrase, or word that puzzles you.

O LORD, You have searched me and known me.

2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up;

You understand my thought from afar.

3 You scrutinize my path and my lying down,

And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.

4 Even before there is a word on my tongue,

Behold, O LORD, You know it all.

5 You have enclosed me behind and before,

And laid Your hand upon me.

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;

It is too high, I cannot attain to it.

7 Where can I go from Your Spirit?

Or where can I flee from Your presence?

8 If I ascend to heaven, You are there;

If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.

9 If I take the wings of the dawn,

If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,

10 Even there Your hand will lead me,

And Your right hand will lay hold of me.

11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me,

And the light around me will be night,"

12 Even the darkness is not dark to You,

And the night is as bright as the day.

Darkness and light are alike to You.

13 For You formed my inward parts;

You wove me in my mother's womb.

14 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;

Wonderful are Your works,

And my soul knows it very well.

15 My frame was not hidden from You,

When I was made in secret,

And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;

16 Your eyes have seen my unformed substance;

And in Your book were all written

The days that were ordained for me,

When as yet there was not one of them.

17 How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God!

How vast is the sum of them!

18 If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand.

When I awake, I am still with You.

19 O that You would slay the wicked, O God;

Depart from me, therefore, men of bloodshed.

20 For they speak against You wickedly,

And Your enemies take Your name in vain.

21 Do I not hate those who hate You, O LORD?

And do I not loathe those who rise up against You?

22 I hate them with the utmost hatred;

They have become my enemies.

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;

Try me and know my anxious thoughts;

24 And see if there be any hurtful way in me,

And lead me in the everlasting way.

Day 3 - OBSERVE: What do I see? (cont'd.)

- 1) What do you learn about God from verses 1-6?

- 2) What do you learn about God from verses 7-12?

- 3) What do you learn about God from verses 13-18?

- 4) What do you learn about God from verses 19-22?

- 5) What do you learn about God from verses 23 and 24?

- 6) What do you observe about the author's experience? How does he feel about God? (vv. 6, 17, 18) How does he feel about the enemies of God? (vv. 19-22)

- 7) What request does the author make? (vv. 23, 24)

Day 4 - INTERPRET: What does it mean?

- 1) After “marinating” in the Psalm for a few days, what is the overall impression of God the Psalmist is seeking to convey?
- A distant God who is unconcerned about humans and their lives
 - A disciplinary God who’s primary goal is to punish the imperfect
 - A weak God who’s knowledge is limited and whose presence can be escaped
 - A majestic, yet intimately personal God who is deeply concerned about those He has made

Defend your answer here:

- 2) What does Genesis 3:6-8 reveal about human nature, particularly how we naturally respond to our sin?
- 3) How does Psalm 139:1-12 help us escape this dangerous tendency to hide?
- 4) What do you think the Psalmist means by verse 6: “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain to it.”
- 5) What does Psalm 139 reveal about God’s view of human life, even at the embryonic stage?

- 6) The Psalm appears to take a sharp turn in verses 19-22. How do you think the Psalmist's talk about the wicked connects to the rest of the Psalm?
- 7) Do you think it's okay to hate those who hate God? (v. 21) How do you think this fits with Jesus' command to love our enemies?
- 8) What do you think it means for God to "search" and "try" one of His own (vv. 23, 24). How does He do this? Why do you think the Psalmist ends by praying for this?

Day 5 - APPLY: How does it work?

The attributes of God most prominently featured in this Psalm are His omniscience (vv. 1-6), omnipresence (vv. 7-12), creative power (vv. 13-18), sovereignty (v. 16), and holiness (vv. 19-22). Choose one of these attributes and think through why and how it matters in your life today. Then, form it into the following prayer of thanksgiving:

God, thank you for being _____ because _____

Spiritual growth consists of applying a little bit of truth to a little bit of life over the course of days, weeks, months, and years. What “little bit of truth” from this Psalm are you seeking to apply right now? In other words, what is your main take-away from your time spent marinating in Psalm 139 and how might it change to way you think/feel/act?

Personalize verses 23 and 24 by making them your own heartfelt request to God.

WEEK 2

Bless the Lord, O My Soul

Psalm 103

I was about a month into my new life as a mom. The sleep deprivation combined with out-of-whack post-partum hormones made for the L-O-N-G-E-S-T, most grueling days imaginable. Ironically, all I was really doing was watching TV and keeping a very tiny human fed and clean. WHY WAS THAT SO HARD FOR ME?

I still can't quite put into words the discouragement and loneliness of that season. The gap between my expectations and reality had never been so large. The gloomy cloud of depression over my head had never lingered so long. The rift between how I thought I was *supposed* to feel about motherhood and how I *actually* felt was haunting – an ever-present source of soul-crushing shame that I just couldn't seem to shake off.

My relationship with the Lord during that season consisted mainly of me saying one word to God over and over and over again: "HELP!" And He did. He always does. One morning, probably more out of desperation than desire, I opened my Bible to Psalm 103 and I read, "Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust."

Dust. I had been trying to think of a way to describe how I felt: the frailty, the extreme fatigue, the boredom, the emotional flat-lining, the utter failure to achieve that Instagram, mommy-blog version of motherhood I had plastered all over my mind. Dust – that was the word. I was smack in the middle of the "dustiest" season of my life, more aware of my inadequacies than ever before. For the first time in my life I felt every bit of the weight of **NOT** being God.

That morning, the one who **IS** God came to me through my reading of Scripture and said: "I know. I know you are dust...and I love you." I realized that morning that I didn't have to prove my parental competence to Him. I didn't have to face each day bright-eyed and bushy-tailed like the highly edited Instamommies in my feed. I didn't have to keep on trying to convince myself that

motherhood is the most wonderful thing ever in order to experience God's favor in this new role. God's response to my perceived failure was not disappointment, but compassion. He wasn't shaking his head, wondering why I couldn't get my act together. He knew why. I'm dust! And just like he did with the very first pile of dust he ever held in his hands, he was ready and willing and able to breathe new life into me (see Genesis 2:7). He did so that day, and the next day, and the next. He's done it every day since. He did it again this morning, and I know beyond any doubt He will do it tomorrow. I know this because He's the great and glorious and oh-so-gracious God described in Psalm 103. May we forget *none* of His benefits!

Day 1 - READ: What does it say?

- Read Psalm 103 in the Bible you most often use for study. Read it out loud if you can!
- Read Psalm 103 in one or two other translations. The YouVersion Bible app makes this very easy! Biblegateway.com is another free resource for accessing various Bible translations. The NIV, ESV, NASB, and the HCSB are my favorites. The Amplified Bible (AMP) translation is another good one to reference.
- If time permits, read a modern paraphrase of Psalm 103 such as *The Message*. You can access *The Message* for free on your YouVersion phone app or biblegateway.com.
- If possible, use the audio function of your YouVersion Bible app to *listen* to Psalm 103 being read in your favorite translation.

Day 2 - OBSERVE: What do I see?

Mark up the text below as follows:

- Use a **RED** pen or colored pencil to circle or underline any characteristics, attributes, actions, or names of God.
- Use a **GREEN** pen or colored pencil to underline any commands in the Psalm.
- Use a **BLUE** pen or colored pencil to circle or underline any characteristics/attributes of humans – you and me.
- Use any color you want to circle or underline any key words and/or phrases. Look for repetition.
- Put a question mark next to any verse, phrase, or word that puzzles you.

Bless the LORD, O my soul,

And all that is within me, bless His holy name.

2 Bless the LORD, O my soul,

And forget none of His benefits;

3 Who pardons all your iniquities,

Who heals all your diseases;

4 Who redeems your life from the pit,

Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion;

5 Who satisfies your years with good things,

So that your youth is renewed like the eagle.

6 The LORD performs righteous deeds

And judgments for all who are oppressed.

7 He made known His ways to Moses,

His acts to the sons of Israel.

8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious,

Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.

9 He will not always strive with us,

Nor will He keep His anger forever.

10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins,

Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,

So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him.

12 As far as the east is from the west,

So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

13 Just as a father has compassion on his children,

So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.

14 For He Himself knows our frame;

He is mindful that we are but dust.

15 As for man, his days are like grass;

As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.

16 When the wind has passed over it, it is no more,

And its place acknowledges it no longer.

17 But the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting

on those who fear Him,

And His righteousness to children's children,

18 To those who keep His covenant And remember His precepts to do them.

19 The LORD has established His throne in the heavens,

And His sovereignty rules over all.

20 Bless the LORD, you His angels,

Mighty in strength, who perform His word,

Obeying the voice of His word!

21 Bless the LORD, all you His hosts,

You who serve Him, doing His will.

22 Bless the LORD, all you works of His,

In all places of His dominion;

Bless the LORD, O my soul!

Day 3 - OBSERVE: What do I see? (cont'd.)

- 1) What is the main command of this Psalm? How many times is it repeated? (vv. 1, 2, 20, 21, 22)
- 2) Here's a list of the attributes/characteristics of God (in the order they appear) that I found in this Psalm. (If you find more, just add to the list.) Write the verse reference to the side.

Holy _____

Forgiving _____

Healer _____

Redeemer _____

Righteous _____

Judge _____

Compassionate _____

Gracious _____

Slow to anger _____

Abounding in lovingkindness _____

Merciful v. 10

Remover of transgressions _____

Compassionate Father _____

Knows us _____

A God of everlasting love _____

King _____

Sovereign over all _____

3) In stark contrast to these mind-blowing attributes of God, how does the Psalm describe us?
(vv. 14-16)

4) List all the verbs you find in verses 3-5.

5) How does the Psalmist describe God's love for His children in the following verses?

vv. 10, 11:

v. 13:

v. 17:

6) Who gets to fully experience this amazing love according to vv. 17- 18?

7) Who does the Psalm command to bless the Lord? (vv. 1, 20, 21, 22)

Day 4 - INTERPRET: What does it mean?

- 1) One of the imperatives of this Psalm is to “forget none of His benefits” (v. 2). According to the following passages, what is often the deeper, more subtle cause of spiritual forgetfulness?
 - Deuteronomy 8:11-14
 - 2 Chronicles 32:24, 25
- 2) What do you think David had in mind when he referred to “the pit” in verse 3? (see Psalm 30:1-3 and Psalm 88:3-7)
- 3) According to Colossians 1:13, 14 how is this redemption from “the pit” reflected in the gospel (in what Jesus has done for sinners)?
- 4) The amazing description of God in verses 8-10 is nearly a direct quote from the words God spoke to Moses in Exodus 34:6, 7, when he passed before Moses on Mount Sinai. What horrible event had taken place just before God painted this portrait of Himself for Moses? (see Exodus 32:1-10)
- 5) How does this bleak, sin-soaked backdrop deepen the significance of what God reveals about Himself (that He’s compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness, etc.)?
- 6) What is the dictionary definition of “compassion”?

7) How is compassion expressed by a good, patient, loving father toward a small child in the following situations?

- When that child is hurting
- When that child is struggling to accomplish a necessary task
- When that child disobeys
- When that child obeys
- When that child makes a mess of things
- When that child runs away
- When that child returns

8) It's obvious that the Psalmist intended to highlight the *massive* contrast between God and man (vv. 14-18). He is truly AWESOME and we are DUST (Genesis 3:19). Why do you think this contrast is so important to the overall theme of the Psalm?

9) How is the "from everlasting to everlasting" love of God reflected in the gospel of Jesus Christ? See Ephesians 1:3-8, 13, 14. Also see Romans 8:29, 30, 35-39.

Day 5 - APPLY: How does it work?

The attributes of God most prominently featured in this Psalm are His grace (vv. 3-5, 8), mercy (v. 10), forgiveness (vv. 3, 9, 12), fatherly compassion (vv. 8, 13, 14), everlasting love (vv. 8, 17), sovereignty (v. 19), and praiseworthiness (vv. 20-22). Choose one of these attributes and think through why and how it matters in your life today. Then, “bless the Lord” by forming it into the following prayer of thanksgiving:

God, thank you for being _____ because _____

Spiritual growth consists of applying a little bit of truth to a little bit of life over the course of days, weeks, months, and years. What “little bit of truth” from this Psalm are you seeking to apply right now? In other words, what is your main take-away from your time spent marinating in Psalm 103 and how might it change to way you think/feel/act?

What practical habits are you seeking to incorporate into your daily life to ensure that you “forget none of His benefits”?

WEEK 3

He Is Our Help and Our Shield

Psalm 33

What is the most dangerous sin? Have you ever thought about that? I have. A lot, in fact. The first thing that has always come to my mind is sexual sin. Not only does the Bible make a strong case for its uniquely defiling and destructive nature (1 Cor. 6:15-20), I have seen it with my own eyes too many times to count. But the longer I live, the more I study God and His Word, and the more I'm able to see clearly the contents of my own heart, I am changing my answer. Sexual sin is not the most dangerous sin. It's a symptom of something much worse: **unbelief**. Unbelief is what causes us to stand in a gorgeous garden full of fragrant fruit trees that are there for us to enjoy to our hearts' content and yet pine after the *one piece* of fruit about which God has said a firm and very clear "no" (Genesis 3:1-7). Unbelief is why we allow the lies of a scheming serpent to drown out the voice of our heavenly Father. Unbelief is why we think we know what's best for us. Unbelief is why we trust in ourselves – our competence, our skillset, our education, our finances, our goodness, our accomplishment – for salvation from a meaningless existence. Unbelief is why we value what is cheap and why we discount what is sacred. On a very practical level, unbelief is why we choose sleep over communion with God. It's why we scroll through Instagram instead of bowing in prayer. We just don't really believe that we need Him *that* much. We don't really believe that apart from abiding in Jesus, we can do **nothing**.

One of the things I love most about the Psalms is how they expose and challenge my unbelief. The theme of almost every chapter of the book of Psalms can be summarized in two words: **TRUST GOD**. Psalm 33 is no exception. It's a powerful call to worship both in song and in faith. It's a much needed reminder that God is faithful in everything He says and does, that His power as displayed in creation is unmatched, and that His plans cannot EVER be thwarted (no matter who's President!). Every line reminds us that God *alone* is a sure hope for salvation. And every line exposes my pride fueled self-reliance as a complete sham. "The king is not saved by a mighty army; a warrior is not delivered by great strength. A horse is a false hope for victory; nor does it

deliver anyone by its great strength” (vv. 16, 17). If that’s true – and it is - what do we do? We “wait for the Lord; ***He is our help and our shield***” (v. 20). There it is again. Those two life-changing, unbelief-crushing words: TRUST GOD. To that end, let’s dig in...

Day 1 - READ: What does it say?

- Read Psalm 33 in the Bible you most often use for study. Read it out loud if you can!
- Read Psalm 33 in one or two other translations. The YouVersion Bible app makes this very easy! Biblegateway.com is another free resource for accessing various Bible translations. (The NIV, ESV, NASB, and the HCSB are my favorites. The Amplified Bible (AMP) translation is another good one to reference.)
- If time permits, read a modern paraphrase of Psalm 33 such as *The Message*. You can access *The Message* for free on your YouVersion phone app or biblegateway.com.
- If possible, use the audio function of your YouVersion Bible app to *listen* to Psalm 33 being read in your favorite translation.

Day 2 - OBSERVE: What do I see?

Mark up the text below as follows:

- Use a **RED** pen or colored pencil to circle or underline any characteristics, attributes, actions, or names of God.
- Use a **GREEN** pen or colored pencil to underline any commands in the Psalm.
- Use any color you want to circle or underline any key words and/or phrases. Look for repetition.
- Put a question mark next to any verse, phrase, or word that puzzles you.

Sing for joy in the LORD, O you righteous ones;

Praise is becoming to the upright.

2 Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre;

Sing praises to Him with a harp of ten strings.

3 Sing to Him a new song;

Play skillfully with a shout of joy.

4 For the word of the LORD is upright,

And all His work is done in faithfulness.

5 He loves righteousness and justice;

The earth is full of the lovingkindness of the LORD.

6 By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,

And by the breath of His mouth all their host.

7 He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap;

He lays up the deeps in storehouses.

8 Let all the earth fear the LORD;

Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.

9 For He spoke, and it was done;

He commanded, and it stood fast.

10 The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations;

He frustrates the plans of the peoples.

11 The counsel of the LORD stands forever,

The plans of His heart from generation to generation.

12 Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,

The people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance.

13 The LORD looks from heaven;

He sees all the sons of men;

14 From His dwelling place He looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth,

15 He who fashions the hearts of them all,

He who understands all their works.

16 The king is not saved by a mighty army;

A warrior is not delivered by great strength.

17 A horse is a false hope for victory;

Nor does it deliver anyone by its great strength.

18 Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him,

On those who hope for His lovingkindness,

19 To deliver their soul from death

And to keep them alive in famine.

20 Our soul waits for the LORD;

He is our help and our shield.

21 For our heart rejoices in Him,

Because we trust in His holy name.

22 Let Your lovingkindness, O LORD, be upon us,

According as we have hoped in You.

Day 3 - OBSERVE: What do I see? (cont'd.)

1) List all of the verbs in the following verses:

v. 1 _____

v. 2 _____

v. 3 _____

v. 8 _____

v. 18 _____

v. 20 _____

v. 21 _____

v. 22 _____

2) What do you learn about God's word in this Psalm? (see vv. 4, 6, 9)

3) What is the contrast between the wisdom/counsel/plans of the nations and the wisdom/counsel/plans of God according to vv. 8-11?

4) What do you learn about God from verses 13 and 14?

5) According to verses 16 and 17, in what faulty resources do kings and warriors put their hope for salvation, deliverance, and victory?

6) According to verses 18-20, what is the one sure and unfailing resource in which to hope?

Day 4 - INTERPRET: What does it mean?

- 1) What does it mean that “all God’s work is done in faithfulness” (v. 4)?

- 2) Verse 4 mentions both God’s word and His work together. Take a minute to think about how those two things are connected and whether or not they can ever be separated. You and I speak well-intentioned words all the time that we may or may not follow-up with works. (How is that New Year’s resolution to give up sugar and read your Bible everyday going? Yeah, I have already failed too!) How is God different than us in this? Why is He able to be different than us in this?

- 3) Go to the very beginning of your Bible and write the first verse (Genesis 1:1) here:

Psalm 33 is one of MANY Psalms that go back to the very beginning, meditating on God as Creator. Why do you think the Psalmists do this?

What is the only proper response to seeing God as Creator? (v. 8)

- 4) Consider what verse 11 says about the plans of the Lord. What other insight(s) do you glean from the following cross references:
 - Proverbs 16:9 and 19:21

 - Isaiah 14:24-27

 - Isaiah 43:12,13

 - Isaiah 45:9

 - Daniel 4:34, 35, and 37

- Romans 11:33-36
- Ephesians 1:11

5) Note the repetition of the word “all” in verses 13-15. Why is this significant?

6) How is God’s all-searching eye a comfort to those who fear Him and hope in Him? (see vv. 18, 19)

Why should it terrify those who ignore or reject Him? (see Romans 14:12 and Hebrews 4:13)

7) What definition most accurately captures the HOPE of verses 18-22?

- Wishful thinking that *maybe* God will come through for His children
- Confident expectation, based on His sure promises, that God will *definitely* come through for His children

8) According to Romans 5:3-5, how is hope cultivated and what does it NOT do?

Day 5 - APPLY: How does it work?

The attributes of God most prominently featured in this Psalm are His praiseworthiness/majesty (vv.1-3, 8), His faithful and powerful word and works (v. 4-6, 9), His creation of all things (vv.6-9), His perfect wisdom (vv. 10-12), His reigning sovereignty (vv.10-12), His omniscience (vv.13-15), His power and grace to save and deliver (vv.18-20), and His lovingkindness (vv. 5, 22). Choose one of these attributes and think through why and how it matters in your life today. Form it into the following prayer of thanksgiving:

God, thank you for being _____ because _____

Spiritual growth consists of applying a little bit of truth to a little bit of life over the course of days, weeks, months, and years. What “little bit of truth” from this Psalm are you seeking to apply right now? In other words, what is your main take-away from your time spent marinating in Psalm 33 and how might it change to way you think/feel/act?

Rewrite verses 16 and 17 to reflect the faulty resources you tend to place your hope in. Here’s mine for an example:

Aprile is not saved by her own competence and skill; she is not delivered by 8 straight hours of solid sleep at night. Reading and following all the Christian parenting books is a false hope for victory; nor does checking off all the right spiritual discipline boxes deliver anyone by its great strength.

Now you give it a try...

WEEK 4

O Taste and See that the Lord is Good

Psalm 34

In his must-read book *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* Eugene Peterson writes, “A Psalm is not a lecture; it is a song. In a psalm we have the observable evidence of what happens when a person of faith goes about the business of believing and loving and following God. We don’t have a rulebook defining the action, we have a snapshot of players playing the game.”² Psalm 34 is a snapshot of a man who looks to God and chooses to praise Him in a very difficult season of life.

Selective reading of the Bible has led some to conclude that God’s desire for His people is a pain-free life characterized by health and wealth. To their credit, this *is* part of God’s ultimate desire for us (Rev. 21, 22), but not yet. This side of heaven, life is hard. Sickness happens, relational conflicts abound, anxiety threatens, and plans fail. I can’t think of a book in all of literature that more honestly and comprehensively acknowledges the harsh realities of living in a fallen world than the Bible. Allow me to quote Eugene Peterson one more time:

At no time is there the faintest suggestion that the life of faith exempts us from difficulties. What [the Bible] promises is preservation from all evil in them...All the water in all the oceans cannot sink a ship unless it gets inside. Nor can all the trouble in the world harm us unless it gets within us...None of the things that happen to you, none of the troubles you encounter, have any power to get between you and God, dilute His grace in you, divert His way from you (see Rom. 8:28, 31-32).³

The worst thing we can do when the hard stuff happens is conclude that God has withdrawn from us, that he’s punishing us for not being a good enough Christian, or that He moved on to focus on bigger and better things. “This girl is just never going to get it. I’m done.”

Psalm 34 is a much-needed reminder that God is not like that. He is with us in our struggles – always near to the brokenhearted, always saving those who are crushed in Spirit (v. 18). “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all” (v. 19). People will

fail us. Our bodies will fail us. Our government will fail us. But God – He never fails. So, what do we do when we're in the thick of it? When this journey of faith starts to get treacherous? When the wicked seem to be scoring all the points? We choose to praise Him in the pain. We bless the Lord *at all times*. We make sure that His praise is continually on our mouths (v. 1). We lean in to our brothers and sisters in Christ and say, "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together" (v. 3)! We trust that one day this trial will be a testimony: "This poor girl cried, and the Lord heard her and saved her out of all her troubles" (v. 6).

Psalm 34 shows us what this looks like.

Day 1 - READ: What does it say?

- Read Psalm 34 in the Bible you most often use for study. Read it out loud if you can!
- Read Psalm 34 in one or two other translations. The YouVersion Bible app makes this very easy! Biblegateway.com is another free resource for accessing various Bible translations. The NIV, ESV, NASB, and the HCSB are my favorites. The Amplified Bible (AMP) translation is another good one to reference.
- If time permits, read a modern paraphrase of Psalm 34 such as *The Message*. You can access *The Message* for free on your YouVersion phone app or biblegateway.com.
- If possible, use the audio function of your YouVersion Bible app to *listen* to Psalm 34 being read in your favorite translation.

Day 2 - OBSERVE: What do I see?

Mark up the text below as follows:

- Use a **RED** pen or colored pencil to circle or underline any characteristics, attributes, actions, or names of God.
- Use a **GREEN** pen or colored pencil to underline any commands in the Psalm.
- Use any color you want to circle or underline any key words and/or phrases. Look for repetition.
- Put a question mark next to any verse, phrase, or word that puzzles you.

I will bless the LORD at all times;

His praise shall continually be in my mouth.

2 My soul will make its boast in the LORD;

The humble will hear it and rejoice.

3 O magnify the LORD with me,

And let us exalt His name together.

4 I sought the LORD, and He answered me,

And delivered me from all my fears.

5 They looked to Him and were radiant,

And their faces will never be ashamed.

6 This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him

And saved him out of all his troubles.

7 The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him,

And rescues them.

8 O taste and see that the LORD is good;

How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!

9 O fear the LORD, you His saints;

For to those who fear Him there is no want.

10 The young lions do lack and suffer hunger;

But they who seek the LORD shall not be in want of any good thing.

11 Come, you children, listen to me;

I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

12 Who is the man who desires life

And loves length of days that he may see good?

13 Keep your tongue from evil

And your lips from speaking deceit.

14 Depart from evil and do good;

Seek peace and pursue it.

15 The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous

And His ears are open to their cry.

16 The face of the LORD is against evildoers,

To cut off the memory of them from the earth.

17 The righteous cry, and the LORD hears

And delivers them out of all their troubles.

18 The LORD is near to the brokenhearted

And saves those who are crushed in spirit.

19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous,

But the LORD delivers him out of them all.

20 He keeps all his bones,

Not one of them is broken.

21 Evil shall slay the wicked,

And those who hate the righteous will be condemned.

22 The LORD redeems the soul of His servants,

And none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned.

Day 3 - OBSERVE: What do I see? (cont'd.)

- 1) When does David say he will bless and praise the Lord? (v. 1)

- 2) What kind of person delights in hearing praise and honor being offered up the God? (v. 2)

- 3) What is David's testimony according to verses 4 and 6?

- 4) What do you learn about God from verse 8?

- 5) What promise is conveyed in verses 9 and 10?

- 6) What is David seeking to teach his readers through this Psalm? (v. 11)

- 7) What is the key to a long, worthwhile life according to verses 12-14?

- 8) What contrast is drawn between the righteous and the wicked in verses 15-22?

9) What does verse 18 say in regard to those who are brokenhearted and crushed in spirit?

10) In verse 19, we have a bad news/good news situation. Identify each:

Bad news:

Good news:

11) Write down the promise of verse 22.

Day 4 - INTERPRET: What does it mean?

- 1) If you look at Psalm 34 in your Bible you will see a heading that says, “A Psalm of David when he feigned madness before Abimelech, who drove him away and he departed.” The back story is that David was running for his life from Saul who wanted to kill him. In the first part of 1 Samuel 21, David is protected by Ahimelech the priest who supplied him with much-needed bread and a sword. After that, David flees for refuge to Philistine territory. That’s where he pretends to be crazy in order to protect himself from the Philistines. Go ahead and read about it for yourself in 1 Samuel 21: 10-15. (Note: The heading of Psalm 34 uses the dynastic title “Abimelech” instead of Achish – the name you’ll see in 1 Samuel 21:10.)

Think for a moment about what it must have been like to run for your life from an enraged and powerful king who is determined to kill you. Jot down some of those emotions here:

This song is so powerful all by itself, but how does this background information further enhance the significance and impact of David’s words in Psalm 34?

- 2) The Psalms are a collection of songs that were used for corporate worship, which is clearly reflected in verse 3. Fill in the following blanks:

*O magnify the Lord with me, and let _____ exalt His name
_____.*

Why do you think the “together” aspect of worship is important to the Psalmist?

- 3) The basic definition of “magnify” is to make something appear larger than it actually is. How does this differ from the biblical concept of magnifying the Lord? (v. 3)

- 4) God is not food, nor can he be visibly seen. How can a person figuratively “taste and see that the Lord is good”?

- 5) What does it mean to “fear the Lord”? (If you have access to a good Bible dictionary or encyclopedia, feel free to use it. Gotquestions.org is my favorite FREE online resource for all sorts of Bible study topics.)

- 6) Why does fearing the Lord have such a huge impact on how we experience God’s provision? (vv. 9-11)

- 7) Verse 11 reveals that the “fear of the Lord” is something we must learn. Why is this significant? How do we learn it? (vv. 12-14 offer some clues)

- 8) First Peter is a New Testament epistle written specifically to believers living as “strangers and aliens” in a world that was very hostile toward them and the gospel they held dear. Interestingly, Psalm 34 is heavily quoted throughout that epistle. Having marinated in the Psalm for a few days now, why do you think Psalm 34 was on Peter’s mind as he sought to encourage weary, persecuted believers?
- 9) How is the truth of verse 22 ultimately fulfilled in the work of Jesus? (see Ephesians 1:7, 8 and Romans 8:1, 33)

Day 5 - APPLY: How does it work?

The attributes of God most prominently featured in this Psalm are His praiseworthiness (vv.1-3), His faithfulness to save/deliver/rescue (vv.4-7, 17-22), His perfect provision (vv. 9, 10), His all-satisfying goodness (v. 8), His righteousness (vv. 15, 16, 19, 21), His protection (vv. 7, 19, 20), and His grace (vv. 6, 22). Choose one of these attributes and think through why and how it matters in your life today. Form it into the following prayer of thanksgiving:

God, thank you for being _____ because _____

Spiritual growth consists of applying a little bit of truth to a little bit of life over the course of days, weeks, months, and years. What “little bit of truth” from this Psalm are you seeking to apply right now? In other words, what is your main take-away from your time spent marinating in Psalm 34 and how might it change to way you think/feel/act?

Read verse 10 one more time. If God is withholding something from you, what conclusion can you draw about that thing?

¹ Tozer, A.W., *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1961), 1, 2.

² Peterson, Eugene, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Dowers Grove: IVP Books, 2000), 61.

³ 42, 43.