



LEADER'S GUIDE

The studies might be fairly long (especially if you have a group that does not prepare). Each study could be covered across two weeks if desired.

STUDY ONE IMAGE BEARERS

(Psalm 8, Hebrews 2:5-18, Genesis 1-3, Philippians 2:5-11)

Do you have a favourite part of God's Creation?
What about it delights/amazes/captivates you?

Read Genesis 1:1-31

1) What do we learn about God?

Highlight that He is the Creator, He creates by His Word -he speaks and it comes to be. His power, glory, order, care, tenderness, intricate detail...

2) What do we learn about human beings?

They are creatures, they are image bearers (created in God's likeness so they can rule), they are given dominion over some parts of creation (living creatures) they are blessed, with humanity in creation it is "very good"

Read Psalm 8

- 3) How does Psalm 8 reflect on the creation account? (What things are highlighted from Creation in the Psalm?)

Verses 1-4 consider the vastness of creation and God's glory in the heavens (Genesis 1:14) and the smallness of humans in it all

Verses 5-8 consider how special humans are as image bearers and focuses on their dominion (Genesis 1:20, 24, 26-27)

- 4) In Psalm 8:1, the word "**glory**" is used. What is **glory**, and why is it significant that humans are "**crowned with glory**" in v. 5?

The word glory in Hebrew literally means weight or heaviness, indicates value God's glory is a revelation of who he is, the visible expression of his holiness it is 'the visible manifestation of His infinite beauty, character and worth (Piper)

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-gods-glory--2>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-glory-of-god/>

By showing God's glory in v.1, then using the same word about humans in v.5, the psalmist is indicating that humans are created in God's image, they are like Him.

This means that we have weight and value, just by being human

Being an image bearer demonstrates humanity's significance and worth

God give his glory to humans, and they in turn are to reflect His glory in creation

- 5) Where do we see limits in God's creation? (Genesis 1)

God sets boundaries for the heavens and separates the waters, He distinguishes the land and sea, earth and sky.

Then he places unique things in these specific spaces: stars, moon, sun in the heavens, fish in the sea, birds in the sky, animals on earth (Birds can't live underwater, and fish cannot live on land)

- 6) What limits are placed on humanity? (Genesis 2)

Humans are finite, in presence and ability

God places them in the space of the garden, they can only be in one place at a time

They are embodied -they have bodies with particular and limited function (eg. we weren't given wings so we can't fly) to enable them to fulfil God's purpose for them They need to rest/sleep (which is why God made day and night)

They need each other, they cannot function or fulfil God's mandate for them on their own

*They can eat fruit from any tree, **except one.***

- 7) What do the limitations God has placed on creation show us, and what should this lead us to do? (ie. how should we respond?)

It is a reminder that we are creatures and that God is bigger, stronger and wiser

We should recognise our limits as given by God, not as flaws

We should understand that our limits don't change our worth or value as His image bearers

We should live within our limits (with the understanding that God has given us intelligence and creativity so there are ways we can push some of those limits -eg we can build aeroplanes to fly), seeking God's wisdom as to which limits are permissible to push

It should lead us to depend on the Creator who made us and who knows best how to live in His creation

"limitations are and invitation to dependence" (Kate Morris)

<https://faithfulgod.net/podcast/neurodivergence-family-and-faith/episode/17-embracing-limitations-finding-freedom-in-gods-plan>

Parenting in God's family Vol. 2, Chapter 11

<https://growingfaith.com.au/articles/the-fine-balance-of-christian-parenting>

Read Genesis 3

8) How do Adam and Eve respond to the limitation placed on them to not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16)?

They do not seek God's wisdom and decide for themselves that this is a boundary that is ok for them to cross

They ignore the limit and eat the fruit

They don't depend on God or trust Him to show them what is good and evil, they choose to decide this for themselves

9) What further limitations are now given to humanity as a result of their actions?

They are banished from God's presence, and access to Him is limited

They are exiled from the garden

They now have to deal with pain

They will have to toil and sweat, fruitfulness will no longer be easy

They will die

They are even more creaturely because they must remember they are made of dust, they are not more godlike as the serpent had promised

They have enemies (Genesis 3:15)

They are now fallen image bearers unable to fully reflect God's glory as they were created to do

In Psalm 8:2, there is a phrase that doesn't seem to be in keeping with the rest of the Psalm:

"Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger."

It stands out by its difference, so let's explore this further...

10) Who is/are the enemy/enemies of God? (ie. the foe/avenger)

See Genesis 3:15, Psalm 2:1-2, 1 Corinthians 15:25-26, Hebrews 2:14, James 4:4, Revelation 12:9

This phrase introduces the fact that in all of God's good creation there is fallenness and that God has enemies:

The serpent (ie. the devil, Satan or the dragon), and the seed of the serpent

Those who plot against Him

Those who are friends with the world

Sin and death

11) How is the enemy resisted/defeated according to the Psalm?

Through the praise of children and infants. (This brings hope that what is fallen will be restored)

12) Why "children and infants"?

Infants are one of the most dependent and helpless creatures on earth

Children and infants are weak and powerless

They are a picture of dependence

13) What does "praise" involve? (Hint: it isn't just about singing!)

Praise glorifies God

It comes from a life lived to God's glory

It comes from living a life dependent on God so that His image is reflected

It is honouring God with heart, soul, mind and strength -with our lips and with our actions (1 Corinthians 10:31)

14) What does this tell us about weakness, limitations and dependence?

2 Corinthians 12:9

Weakness and limitations are not bad if they drive us to dependence

God uses weakness to magnify His power

Godly dependence establishes a stronghold against the enemy

When we depend on God we glorify Him

15) How might this tie in with Genesis 3:15-16?

The serpent crushing seed/offspring of the woman will be born as a baby

The One who will defeat all God's enemies will be the One who lives a life in weakness and humility, completely dependent on God, and who perfectly reflects His image and glory

16) How does God show that he cares for humanity, even after the fall? (Psalm 8:4)

He doesn't destroy them then and there

He provides opportunities for repentance and reconnection with Him

He sets out his redemption plan, and works through humans to bring it about

He keeps sending His word to his people

He sends his one and only Son to redeem fallen humanity

Read Hebrews 2:5-18 (*Psalm 8 is cited in v. 6-8*)

17) According to Hebrews, why does Jesus come to share in humanity's "flesh and blood"? (v.14) See also *Philippians 2:5-11*

Jesus takes on our weakness and the limitations of humanity so as a human, he can live as a perfect image bearer. He knows fully all our human limitations, problems, suffering and temptations and overcomes them to help us in our weakness and to break the power of sin and death.

18) Hebrews 2:9-10 tells us that Jesus is crowned with glory and honour and that sons and daughters are brought to glory through Him. How is this accomplished, and how does this shape our understanding of Psalm 8?

Jesus is the perfect image bearer, he is crowned with glory because he lived a life of perfect dependence and obedience, and he conquered all His (and our) enemies.

By his perfect sacrifice in his suffering and death, he represents all of humanity and not only bears their sin, but enables them to glorify God as they were created to do

Jesus restores humans to their pre-fall state as full image bearers, humans filled with God's glory, by his perfect sacrifice for sin, and by succumbing to the weakness of the "dust" of the human body, he overcomes death to bring a new and glorious shape to humanity

19) Jesus embraced the limitations of humanity. How does this help us view our own limitations, and how might this encourage you if/when you find your capacity (physical, mental or emotional) isn't what you (or others) think it ought to be?

We should view our limitations as opportunities to depend on God

Our weaknesses are opportunities for God to show His power and strength

They are reminders that we are creatures who need their Creator

Jesus shows us how to face our limitations, and he is there with us through them

Jesus brings hope and healing to all our brokenness

20) How does knowing God's character, his purposes for his people, and the hope of glory, as reflected in the Psalm, help us as we live in the imperfections and the limitations of the here and now?

It is good to know that our weaknesses and limitations are not outside God's power or control, and that they are in fact, gifts and an invitation to rest in him and depend on Him.

God always shows that He is good and we can depend on Him for all we need

God's power is displayed in our weaknesses so it's ok to be weak and vulnerable

God's love is not dependent on my capacity, or ability, he loves me because I am his child created in His image and made alive in Christ

Having hope for glory helps us to endure patiently until all things are renewed

STUDY TWO PRESENCE

(Psalm 139, Hebrews 4:14-5:10, Psalms 23, 27 & 84, Matthew 1:21-25, Colossians 1:15-23)

How well do we know people?

Who do you know best and how did you come to know them to this degree?

Read Psalm 139

- 1) This Psalm outlines the intimate knowledge God has about the psalmist. Outline all the things that God knows:

All his actions (sitting, lying down, rising, going out)

All his thoughts and words

Everywhere he goes

His conception and development in the womb

Things that are in the open and things that are hidden

What is in his heart

Every day ordained for his life, when he will die

- 2) What stands out to you? Why?

- 3) How does this knowledge make the psalmist feel?

He is awed by the incomprehensible knowledge of God

It causes him to trust God (v.10 Your hand will hold me fast)

It causes him to confess and ask for God to lead him (v. 24)

- 4) What might make someone want to flee from God's presence (v.7)?

(See Genesis 3:8, Numbers 10:35, Jonah 1:1-3, Colossians 1:21, Revelation 6:15-17)

Disobedience, defiance, being his enemy, hostility and evil, refusal to repent

- 5) Why would contemplating God's intimate knowledge of himself, lead the psalmist (in this case, king David) to think about God's enemies in v.19-22?

He recognises that ever since the garden of Eden, all of humanity has been cast away from God's presence and counted as God's enemies, but the Psalmist doesn't want to be an enemy of God

He may be being persecuted for trusting in God so considers them his own enemies as well

He recognises the need for those who oppose God to be brought to justice

- 6) According to David, what are the characteristics of God's enemies? (Also, review STUDY ONE question 10 for a reminder about who God's enemies are.)

wicked, bloodthirsty, speak evilly of God, miss-use God's name, hate God, rebel against God

7) Why might he count God's enemies as his own enemies? (v.22)

*He is God's anointed king who represents God, so God's enemies are his enemies
He has decided to be on God's side so those who oppose God will also oppose
him*

8) In these verses (19-22) he uses very strong and harsh language, is this merited? (Why/ why not?) How does this line up with Jesus' command to "love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44)?

*This **imprecatory** section of the psalm is a plea for God's justice, that people wouldn't get away with doing evil, but that God would see evil and bring righteous punishment*

Maybe his harsh words are a warning to those who think they can get away with doing evil, so that they might repent (loving someone means that you don't hide the truth from them, so if they are heading down a path to ruin, they need to be warned.)

Jesus commands people to love their enemies, with the hope being that they would turn in repentance and find forgiveness and salvation. Pretending someone is right when they are wrong is not loving, nor is it helping them to avoid the consequences of their actions which God will eventually bring to judgement.

Imprecatory Psalms = Psalms which curse enemies

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/should-we-curse-enemies/?queryID=24c6b0c2713be18c07c93577963fa0c2>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/love-your-enemies-not-mean/?queryID=24c6b0c2713be18c07c93577963fa0c2>

9) What does thinking about God's enemies prompt the psalmist to do in v. 23-24? Why would he do this?

*He wants God to make sure his heart is right, this shows a repentant attitude, willing to be corrected and led if he is doing the wrong (offensive to God) thing
The psalm starts and ends with the LORD searching him and knowing him, he is willing for God to put a spotlight on his sin so that he can repent*

10) What is meant by "the way everlasting"? (v.24)

way: God's good path, living in a way that is dependent on God and obedient to Him

everlasting: indicates that there is a hope beyond this physical world that ends in death... something eternal

Since before Genesis, God's purpose and plan was to be **with** His people, as in the garden of Eden. This was seen tangibly on Mt Sinai, in the tabernacle and in the temple. These were not the full experience of God's presence, but they provided a longing for what was to come. God promised that he *would* be with his people, and that he *would* make a way for them to be with Him forever. We see a yearning in Scripture for God to dwell with His people and for the people to be in the presence of God. (See Psalm 23:6, 27:4, 84:1-2,10)

Matthew 1:21-25

11) What does Jesus' name indicate about him and what he would do?

Jesus- God is my salvation (Yeshua)- he will save people from their sin

Immanuel- God with us- he will be the one who makes a way for his people to be able to have restored relationship with God

Colossians 1:15-23

12) What does it mean that all God's fullness "dwells" in Christ?

Jesus is the perfect image bearer, he perfectly reflects the glory and character of the Father. (Just as in Psalm 8:5 and Hebrews 2:9)

He is fully God and fully man

He makes it possible for God to dwell with us

13) What has Jesus done so that we can dwell with God?

Makes peace by the blood of his perfect sacrifice on the cross

Reconciles us from being enemies to being his children, through his physical death which he received as the consequence for our sin not his own

Hebrews 4:14-5:10

14) Why is Jesus able to empathise with our weaknesses? How does this encourage us when we are feeling weak?

Because he entered into humanity and embraced the limitations and weaknesses of human beings

He lived a life filled with all the struggles and temptations that humans face

He suffered as a human so he understands our suffering

This is encouraging because he identifies with our suffering, and he can help us because he has been through it too

It shows that he is not distant but close to us when we are/feel broken

15) What does it mean in v.8 when it says that Jesus "learned obedience from what he suffered"?

Philippians 2:8 he became obedient to the point of death

Hebrews 2:10 he is made perfect through what he suffered

Jesus was and is the eternal Son, he was already perfectly obedient as part of the Godhead

In the form of a man, he needed to be obedient in conditions that he had never experienced before: weakness, temptation, hunger, thirst, pain, grief and intense suffering, so in this sense, he is learning to be obedient

Jesus knew how to be obedient, but this obedience is tested by tough conditions, and he does it!

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-did-jesus-learn-obedience-and-become-perfect>

16) How might this speak into our suffering?

Jesus knows what it is like to suffer, so he can help us, he doesn't ask us to do anything that he hasn't already done

*It helps us see that our suffering isn't outside of God's control, but is an opportunity for us to grow or be perfected just as Jesus was
It points us to hope beyond suffering.... The glory that follows*

17) Psalm 139:23 asks God to test and know the psalmist's "anxious thoughts" or "cares". How does thinking about God's knowledge of you and what he has done in Christ for you shape/change/inform any of your own 'anxious thoughts'?

Anxiety is something that we have little control over, but it is good to know that we can share our anxious thoughts with God, in fact we don't even have to share them, because he already knows them (Psalm 139:2)

God doesn't just know our thoughts, but he cares about us.

If God's knowledge and power keeps the universe going, and extends to the far reaches of the heavens and into the tiniest cells of the body, then I can trust him with the things that drive my anxious thoughts, especially when things are outside my control, they are never outside His control

18) What things are comforting about God's presence and his intimate knowledge of all your circumstances and even your deepest thoughts?

He knows me inside out, even the worst things that I hide from everyone else, and yet he still loves me, and sent his son to rescue me.

19) One of the impacts of mental ill health can be feeling isolated and alone, how could this passage be a comfort?

Sometimes we feel that God (and other people) might be far away, but His knowledge of us and his promise to be with us is reassuring, it is helpful to know that there is a reality that doesn't depend on our feelings.

Our feelings show where we are at, and this is not wrong or bad, but they don't necessarily tell us what is true, but we can trust God to tell us what is true in spite of what we feel

STUDY THREE LAMENT

(Psalm 42, Psalm 22, Matthew 26:36-40 & 27:45-54)

How does our society deal with grief, tragedy and/or anguish?

Read Psalm 42

1) What things stand out to you about the Psalm? Does anything surprise you?

The guy is so overwhelmed!

He accuses God

He doesn't hold back his feelings, but pours them out

2) What questions are asked in the Psalm?

When? (x1)

Where? (x2)

Why? (x6)

3) Who is asking each question, and to whom are each of the questions addressed?

v.2 *who= the psalmist to whom= to whoever is listening / general*

v.3 *who= people (enemies?) to whom= to the psalmist*

v.5 *who= the psalmist to whom= to himself*

v.9 *who= the psalmist to whom= to God*

v.10 *who= foes to whom= to the psalmist*

v. 11 *who= the psalmist to whom= to himself*

4) What is causing the psalmist distress? (v.1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11)

His soul is thirsting for God (he is feeling far away from God, feeling like God is not there?)

He is distraught, crying day and night

He hasn't been able to "meet with God" (attend worship)

He misses being part of the worshipping community

He is downcast/depressed

He is feeling overwhelmed, like he is drowning under massive waves

He is mourning

He is oppressed by the enemy

He is being taunted by his enemies

He is disturbed / in turmoil

5) What does the psalmist accuse God of? (v.7, 9)

Sweeping his waves over him and forgetting him

6) Have the psalmist's problems been resolved at the end of the Psalm?

No

7) What truths does the psalmist declare/affirm about God even as he pours out his grief and anguish?

God is his protection (v.4)

God is the Mighty One (v.4)

He can place his hope in God (v.5, 11)

God is his salvation/ Saviour (v.5, 11)

God is his God (v. 5, 11)

God loves him (v.8)

God is the God of his life (God gave him life and keeps him alive, he belongs to God) (v. 8)

God is his Rock (v.9)

8) What does the psalmist hope for? (v. 5, 11)

Restored fellowship with God, the ability to praise God, that God will not fail

9) What might be the purpose of the Psalm (especially if the problems are not resolved immediately, or may not be resolved for a long time)?

Pour out emotion and bring his distress to God

An expression of trust, that even though there are overwhelming negative feelings and he feels far from God, he is still holding on to hope that God is good and faithful

Lament is the biblical way to process grief/distress

<https://www.9marks.org/article/what-does-a-prayer-of-lament-sound-like/>

<https://www.9marks.org/article/why-we-added-a-prayer-of-lament-to-our-sunday-gathering/>

<https://www.9marks.org/article/3-reasons-we-ought-to-corporately-lament/>

Psalm 22

10) Make a note of how the psalmist expresses distress/grief and what he requests, and what he affirms about God in his grief.

Distress:

Asking why? (v.1)

Feeling abandoned (v.1)

Crying out but not getting any answers (v.2)

No rest (v.2)

Mocked and scorned (v.6-7)

There is trouble and no one to help (v.11)

Surrounded by enemies (v.12,13,16)

People gloating (v.17)

He is dying (v. 14 poured out like water, v.15 laying in the dust of death)

Requests/pleas:

Don't be far from me (v.11, 19)

Rescue me (v.21)

Come quickly to help me (v.19)

Save me (v.21)

Deliver me (v.20)

Truths about God affirmed:

He is enthroned as the Holy One (v.3)

He is trustworthy because He delivered his ancestors (v.4)

He saved his people who cried out to Him (v.5)

He gave him life and has sustained him (v.9-10)

God is his strength (v.19)

He listens to the cry of the afflicted one (v.24)

He provides for his people (especially the afflicted) and they are satisfied (v.26)

All dominion belongs to Him and He rules over the nations (v.28)

He is righteous (v.31)

11) What is the hope expressed in this Psalm?

God is the only One who can provide rescue, from his circumstances, but particularly from death (deliver my soul v.20)

God will fulfill his promises (v. 27 - see Genesis 12:3)

Resurrection hope:

v.22 cited in Hebrews 2:12 speaking of the resurrection,

v.29 those who go down to the dust (i.e die, which is part of the curse in Genesis 3:19) will worship,

v.31 "he has done it" -similar to "it is finished" John 19:30 (when Jesus accomplishes his work at the cross) and "it is done!" Revelation 16:17 & 21:6 (speaking about salvation achieved).

Matthew 26:36-46 & 27:45-54

12) When Jesus faces his darkest moments, what does he do in his deep sorrow? (See also 1 Peter 2:21-23)

He cries out to the LORD.

He entrusts himself to God's will

He waits in faith for God to vindicate him (which He does by raising him from the dead)

13) What does having Psalm 22 on his lips as he is dying show about Jesus' suffering and his hope?

He is expressing the anguish of the Psalm as well as the hope of the Psalm - that God will listen to his cry and raise Him from the dead and vindicate him.

He is also indicating that he is fulfilling the Psalm

14) Are there any scriptures that are a comfort to you when you are struggling, or in deep distress? (eg. Lamentations 3:22-23, Romans 8, 1 Peter 5:6-7)

15) Do you struggle to be honest about your emotions when you pray, why or why not?

Write your own prayer of lament (or do it as a group) using the following guide:

You don't need to read all the following Psalms, they are just listed so that people can look at them later and maybe use them as a template for their own lament

LEARNING TO LAMENT

Psalms of Lament

Personal- 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 13, 17, 22, 25, 26, 28, 31, 39, 42, 43, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 70, 71, 77, 86, 120, 141, 142

Corporate- 12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 94, 123, 126

Movements of lament

Psalm _____

My Lament

Turn to God

Address God as you come to Him in prayer.

Bring your complaint

Identify in blunt language the specific pain or injustice. *Why?* or *How?* Is often part of the complaint.

Ask Boldly

Specifically call on God to act in a manner that fits His character and resolves your complaint.

Choose to trust

Affirm God's worthiness to be trusted, and commit to praising Him.

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STUDY FOUR FAMILY

(Psalm 133, Romans 12, Ephesians 4:1-16, 1 John 4:7-21)

When/where do you most feel like you belong?

Read Psalm 133

- 1) In the Old Testament, who are God's people? From a New Testament Perspective who are God's people?

In the OT, God's people are those he chooses, they listen to God's voice and put their trust in Him. Abraham was chosen by God, and God promised to bless all the nations of the earth through him. His descendants became the people of Israel, who God chose and rescued from slavery and called to be his people.

In the NT, again it is people chosen by God, but who now listen to the voice of His Son and put their trust in Him. There is no longer a divide between the children of Abraham and the other nations, anyone who has faith in Jesus is part of His family

- 2) What does the psalmist desire for God's people?

That they live together in unity, and share in the blessing of being in God's presence forever

Note: some translations say "brothers" instead of God's people in v.1, this is ironic in a Biblical sense, because the history of God's people shows that it was rare for brothers to be in unity (ie. Cain/Abel, Jacob/Esau, Joseph/all his brothers, and later in Israel's History there was fighting between Benjamin and the other tribes and between Israel and Judah)! It is something that has not been attained.

In verse 2, when describing how good unity is for God's people, the psalmist uses a very unusual analogy: that of oil on the head and running down Aaron's beard onto his robe!

- 3) Who is Aaron, and what was his role in Israel? (See Exodus 28:1-3, 29:4-9)

*Aaron is Moses' brother who became the first High priest in Israel.
His job was to represent God to the people and the people to God.
He mediated between God and the people
He was to offer sacrifices in the temple for the forgiveness of sin*

- 4) Why would precious oil on the head and oil running down Aaron's beard be a good thing? (See Exodus 30:30-32)

*Precious oil was a very special blend of oils used specifically for anointing
It set the priest apart for serving in the temple
The people needed an anointed priest so that the offerings for sin could be made and accepted
The anointing oil was also used to anoint the king
To have oil on the head and running down the beard meant that there were anointed ones to mediate for the people and rule over the people
The word 'anointed' in Hebrew is where the word Messiah comes from*

- 5) Why does the psalmist use this image, and what does it tell us about what is needed for unity?

*It shows us the need for the Anointed One, to bring forgiveness. Without forgiveness, there cannot be peace with God, and this means that there could be no peace between people either. In the psalmist's mind perfect unity can only come when the right worship of God is happening
True brotherly love is impossible without a right relationship with God*

The next image of something good and pleasant is dew from **Mount Hermon** falling on **Zion**.

Some helpful things to know:

Zion is also called the city of David, it is another name for Jerusalem, but it is often used to describe God's people and/or the perfected place where God dwells with his people forever.

Mount Hermon is located in the far north of Israel. It is one of the highest points in the region. Significantly, it is snow-capped, and the dew that descends on its heights contrasts with the arid surrounding areas. Additionally, Hermon is a major source of the Jordan River. When the ice caps thaw, water from Hermon flows down to water the whole land.

- 6) What does the use of this image evoke? (See Genesis 2: 5-6 & 10, Deuteronomy 8:7-9, 11:11-12, 32:1-3)

*The image of dew reminds us of how God watered the plants in the beginning in Eden, water then flowed from Eden out to the world
It is also a reminder of how God promised that He would care for the land of Israel by sending dew and rain
It is a picture of God's blessing*

- 7) What is the overall picture that this Psalm is giving us?

It is a picture of a new Eden (or a new creation!) where God's blessing flows because there is an anointed priest/king mediating between God and his people providing right relationship with God and right worship, so all God's people can live in unity (in brotherly love) and peace forevermore (pointing to an eternal hope) in God's presence.

Interesting aside- Mt Hermon is a possible site for the transfiguration

Romans 12:1-21 & Ephesians 4:1-16

- 8) What is the common theme in these passages?

*God's New Testament people (the Church) are to be united in love
They are described as a body with lots of parts, with different functions, but are all joined together and working together*

- 9) Make a list of all the different roles/gifts that Paul describes:

Romans: prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, showing mercy

Ephesians: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers

Paul is not making an exhaustive list, but just giving his readers a sense of the diversity among God's people

10) What is the purpose of these?

To form one body and belong to one another (Rom. 12:5)

To grow, support one another, and build one another up in love (Eph. 4:12,16)

To equip each other for works of service (Eph 4:12)

To reach unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son (Eph 4:13)

To become mature (Eph 4:13,15)

To attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13)

So that we are not tossed about by false teaching (Eph 4:14)

11) What is the ultimate goal?

To be one/unified in Christ for the glory of God

12) How is this possible?

Through Christ who is the Head (Eph 4;15-16)

In Christ (Rom 12:5)

It is through the work of Christ that this is possible

13) What ways do you see our church living out what Paul describes in these passages?

14) What areas do we as a church need to grow in?

15) What about you personally? How are you challenged by these passages?

John 13:34-35 & 1 John 4:7-21, underline or highlight the word **love** as you go.

Love is repeated 26 times in 15 verses!

16) Where does love come from?

Love comes from God, because God is love (v.7-8)

17) What does true love look like?

God sent his only Son, so that we might live through his atoning sacrifice for our sins (v.9,10)

Love is sacrificial, intentional, costly, life giving

18) How do we become loving?

It starts by knowing God (v.7)

Acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God (v.15)

Live in God (v.16) having His Spirit (v.13)

Relying on God's love (v.16)

(It is not something that we can conjure up for ourselves, it has to come from God)

19) How can we show loving care to those who are experiencing difficulties/ affliction?

20) What are some ways your group could support someone at church who has shared a mental health struggle?

STUDY FIVE HOPE

(Psalm 17, 1 Peter 1:3-12, Revelation 21)

What is something that you hoped for or longed for and how did you feel when you received it?

Read Psalm 17

- 1) What is David experiencing? (Why might he be seeking vindication?) Have you ever been able to relate to these feelings?

He has been living faithfully to God and doing what is right (v.1-5)

But wicked people are trying to destroy him (v.9), they have him surrounded (v.11) and it looks like they are winning

He wants vindication because he knows the wicked deserve judgement and those who follow the Lord should be saved (v.14)

It seems unfair that the wicked seem to be getting away with their evil deeds and that he is suffering, and they are not

- 2) How does David's life (v.3-5) differ from the life of the wicked (v.10-12, 14)? What makes the difference?

He has been truthful (v.1), he has been careful with his words (v.3), he has not planned to do evil (v.3), he hasn't been violent or taken bribes (v.4), he has faithfully followed God's ways (v.5)

The wicked seek to do evil - destroy/kill him (v.9, 11-12), their hearts are calloused, they speak arrogantly (v.10), they seek rewards from this life (v.14)

- 3) What things does he ask of the LORD?

Hear his plea, listen to his cry (v.1)

Answer him (v.6)

Turn his ear to hear his prayer (v.6)

Show him the wonders of His love (v.7)

Keep him as the apple of his eye (v.8)

Hide him in the shadow of His wings (v.8)

Rise up and confront the enemies and bring them down (v.13)

Rescue him from the wicked (v.13)

That the wicked would receive just judgement (v.14)

- 4) How does this help him?

He takes his frustration and fear and anxiety and gives it to God.

He reminds himself of what God has done before, and of promises He has made

v.7 The wonders of His love (Exodus 34:6-7)

v.7, 14 Salvation by God's hand (Exodus 3:20, 7:4, 15:6)

v.8 The apple of your eye (Deuteronomy 32:10)

v.8 The shadow of your wings (Exodus 19:4, Deuteronomy 32:11)

5) What hope is he expressing in v.15?

Unlike the wicked whose reward is in this life (v.14), David's hope is for something beyond this life: -to see God's face when he "awakes".

This anticipates an awakening from death -demonstrating a hope in the resurrection

Some versions say 'I will behold your face in righteousness' (ESV) this indicates the hope that he will be made right before God (ie. sins forgiven) and be able to see God face to face without fear (see Exodus 33:20)

He will be satisfied: all his longings will be fully satisfied in being in the presence of God, there is nothing that he will ever need or want for again

6) How does having this hope help him cope in his current circumstances?

*He trusts God **in** the circumstance (to do what is right) and also trusts that God will determine the **outcome**, and will ultimately bring justice -even if it isn't until the life to come*

He has confidence that even if things don't change in the 'here and now', the wicked will not get away with things forever, but that the eternal perspective is that God's justice will catch up with the wicked sooner or later

The eternal perspective is the true perspective because the pain and distress and even the comforts of the here and now won't last forever, but the everlasting rest is still to come.

1 Peter 1:3-12

7) How has Jesus made what was expressed in Psalm 17:15 a certain hope for us?

He has given us new birth into a living hope through his resurrection from the dead His death for sin makes it possible for us to be in God's presence (see Him face to face), his resurrection from the dead is our assurance.

8) Why are the readers of Peter's letter able to rejoice in suffering?

The truth of the hope of the resurrection and eternal life through Christ transcends any circumstance in the here and now. These truths don't change depending on their circumstances or how they feel, so they might not be happy, they may be groaning, but the eternal truth (that is the true reality), surpasses any circumstance or discomfort they currently experience -which is temporary (See 2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

9) How is being "filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy" (v.8) different from being happy?

Happiness is an emotion, and emotions change, but joy is a spiritual gift (see Galatians 5:22) it is based on a permanent truth and will never change, because the Spirit of God supernaturally places it in our hearts.

Happiness is external, but joy is internal- sometimes it expresses itself as rejoicing and smiling/laughing, but sometimes it is expressed as groaning and longing amidst tears.

To lament before God and trust him in our circumstances, pouring out our heart in sorrow in faith is just as much an outworking of inexpressible joy as singing and smiling.

We can't be smiling all the time, but we can always trust in our faithful God.

- 10) When we are suffering our emotions can feel like they are always changing, how could knowing *inexpressible and glorious joy* be an anchor in times of trial?

It is good to know, despite our changeable emotions and circumstances, that God and his truths are unchanging, dependable and faithful

To have a firm, unchanging truth to hold fast to in difficult circumstances is a reminder that our emotions are not what govern what is real, they are just a reflection of our humanity and of our need to depend on God, who holds the truth, and who governs reality

Revelation 21:1-7

- 11) What is your first impression of the "new order of things"?

- 12) What excites you the most about this picture?

- 13) Make a list of things that were part of the first heaven and first earth that are now passing away:

tears, death, mourning, crying, pain

- 14) What is the reason that those things will not be in the new creation?

*There is a new order of things because Jesus has conquered and dealt with sin and **all** its consequences*

God now dwells with His people, and in His presence, everything evil is banished

- 15) How does that give us hope for our life now?

The work of Jesus is complete, so we know that this world and its suffering is only temporary -so this enables us to persevere

In a sense, we are already part of that future, it is already ours (See Ephesians 1:13-14, 2:6-7), so we can be patient for its fulfilment, and trust God to do what He knows is right and best for us until that time

We can trust God in the tears, and crying and mourning and pain because we know that it is dealt with, and they remind us that until things are made new, we need to depend on Him in our weakness

- 16) Mental ill health can make it difficult to feel like healing is possible. How does the hope of the new creation impact how we think about healing?

Think about the fact that some things may never be healed in this life, -how this hope helps us deal with the event of not getting what we might want now.

- 17) How can we encourage each other to remember the hope we have in Jesus?

Resources:

- **The Mental Health and Pastoral Care Institute**
- <https://mentalhealthinstitute.org.au/?v=8bcc25c96aa5> – resources, factsheets, recordings and upcoming events centred around a Christian understanding of pastoral care and mental health. A good introduction.
- **Down Not Out** by Chris Cipollone – a mix of lived experience and theological insight. A good introduction.
- **Mental Health and Your Church A Handbook for Biblical Care** by Helen Thorne and Dr Steve Midgley - sections introducing different types of mental ill health and practical steps for caring well for each other.
- **Finding Lost Words: The Churches Right to Lament** edited by Geoff Harper and Kit Barker – a more technical series of essays on Lament in the Psalms.
- **Wayfarers: A Christian Approach to Mental Health Care** by Warren Kinghorn– a more technical read on a Christian approach to mental health care including history, theology, philosophy and psychiatry.
- **Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament** by Mark Vroegop - a guide to expressing sorrow and pain to God through lament, finding solace and trust in His grace during life's darkest moments. It looks at lament in general and then specifically at some of the lament Psalms as well as Lamentations.

Mental Health Support

If you or someone you are with is in immediate danger, call 000

Lifeline: 13 1114 <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636 <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

1800 Respect (DV/sexual assault helpline)
<https://1800respect.org.au/>

Mental Health Line: 1800 011 511
<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/Pages/mental-health-line.aspx>

We don't want you to walk alone, please let someone you trust know that you are struggling.

