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Praying the Psalms:

A prayer for everything

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8 Sessions

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OZARK CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

Session 1: When you are afraid, the LORD is your light (Psalm 27)

Summary: There is a prayer for every situation and season of life. Fear is a universal human emotion, a natural reaction to any perceived threat. David shouts back at his fear by declaring the realities of God's nature. Focusing on this, he finds the courage to wait and trust.

Background: David's life was threatened on many occasions. He was pursued by Saul for several years and later by his son Absalom who had usurped his throne and sought to kill him. In each case, David was on the move from one hiding place to another. You can read about one of those episodes in 1 Samuel 23:15-28. Here David's friend Jonathan tells him not to fear and he strengthens him in the LORD. Just as David is about to be captured by Saul's men, Saul is drawn away and David finds refuge in a stronghold in En Gedi.

Opening Questions:

1. What were some of your childhood fears? How did you deal with them?
2. What fears are you facing today? What impact do they have on your daily life?
3. Have you experienced a moment when God's help showed up at just the right time?

Study Questions:

1. What three metaphors does David use to describe the LORD in verse 1?
2. How does each of these relate to David's experience on the battlefield?
3. How does each of these give David confidence (vs. 3)?
4. Is David on the battlefield or in the tabernacle when he prays verses 4-6?
5. What is the "one thing" that David asks of the LORD (vs. 4)?
6. What does it mean to "gaze upon the beauty of the LORD?" (v. 4)
7. What does it mean to "seek God's face" (vs. 8)?
8. In addition to the physical threats on the battlefield, what other challenges is he facing (vs. 12)?
9. To whom is David speaking in verse 14? Himself? Anyone who will listen?
10. In what sense is Jesus our light, salvation, and stronghold?

Application Questions:

1. While your life may not be in danger the same way David's was, what spiritual attacks are you dealing with?
2. David placed his confidence in the LORD (vs. 3). What alternatives to the LORD are you tempted to place your confidence in?
3. If you could ask "one thing" of the LORD, what would it be? Have you asked lately?
4. Verses 4-6 suggest that David is worshiping in response to his fears. How does worship help you overcome fear? Describe a time when you experienced this.
5. David's "ask" in this psalm seems to be for vision, to see God more clearly (vs. 4). How do you go about "seeing" God in practical ways?
6. "Dwelling in the LORD's house" and "seeking his face" are metaphors for experiencing God's presence. What can you do to experience a greater sense of God's presence throughout your day-to-day life?
7. What are some dark places in your life that could use some light?

Other psalms about fear: 3, 24, 34, 46, 56, 91, 112, 118

Session 2: When you are disappointed, the LORD is still at work (Psalm 74)

Summary: Approximately one third of the Psalms are prayers of lament. These psalms express disappointment, frustration, and even anger over God's apparent inaction. They essentially ask, "If God is good and he's all powerful, why does he choose to stand by when evil happens? If nothing is impossible for God, why at times does he seem to do nothing?"

Background: Asaph, an eyewitness to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BC, wrote Psalm 74 to express both his frustration at God as well as his hope for future deliverance. With the fall of the city, the desecration of the temple, and the majority of the population in exile, it seemed like the end of the Jewish people. For details on these historical events, read Jeremiah 39:1-10; 52:1-30; 2 Kings 25:1-26; 2 Chronicles 36:15-23, and the book of Lamentations.

Opening Questions:

1. When was the last time you experienced disappointment with God? When did he fail to do something that you thought he should?
2. When you consider the horrors of war, the evil of human trafficking, or the latest mass shooting, who do you blame?
3. Do you know anyone who has walked away from God because of their disappointment in him?

Study Questions:

1. What crisis of faith did the destruction of the temple and their exile in Babylon bring to the Jewish people?
2. What promises had God made to the Jewish people that now seemed to be broken?
3. If God is so powerful, why didn't he save his people from their enemies this time like he did in the past?
4. Psalm 79 is a companion to Psalm 74, emphasizing the human toll of this national trauma. What stands out in Asaph's description of the carnage in that psalm?
5. Why do you think the Babylonians acted as they did? How do you think they felt about this event?
6. Is the psalmist concerned with God's reputation (vs. 10)? Why?
7. What does the psalmist want God to do with his hands (vs. 11)?
8. Which verse represents the turning point in the psalm?
9. In verses 12-17, the psalmist looks to the past to give meaning to the present. What past events does he focus on? How are they relevant to his current situation?
10. What language in verses 13-14 makes you think of Jesus?
11. Taking the long view of history, what positive things resulted from the Jewish exile in Babylon?

Application Questions:

1. Have you ever felt like God has been angry at you? Forgotten you? Ignored you?
2. Have you ever had a crisis of faith like the psalmist? Has it been resolved? How?
3. Do you find it difficult to speak honestly with God? What are you afraid of?
4. What does creation reveal about the nature of God? How can this bring us comfort when we are struggling with chaos in our lives?
5. What monsters would you like God to crush in your life right now?
6. As you kayak down the river of life, how can you trust that God knows what's around the bend?

Other psalms expressing disappointment: 13, 22, 39, 44, 60, 77, 79, 88, 102, 137

Session 3: When you are guilty of sin, the LORD forgives (Psalm 32)

Summary: When we sin, we not only violate God's law, but we disrupt our relationship with him and with others. The resulting guilt will destroy us if we do not come clean and confess our sin before God. The key word in this psalm is "covering." David *covered* up his sins and was miserable. When he confessed them to God, they were *covered* (atoned) by God's grace, and God himself became for David a *hiding place*. The psalm celebrates the blessedness of forgiveness by God's grace and offers wisdom to those suffering in the prison of guilt.

Background: Like Psalm 51, this psalm may have been composed following David's public acknowledgment of his adultery with Bathsheba and ensuring cover-up which resulted in the murder of her husband Uriah. You can read the account of these events in 2 Samuel 11-12.

Opening Questions:

1. Have you ever played "hide and seek"? Describe your best hiding place.
2. Can you think of a time when you learned a lesson "the hard way"?
3. Have you ever had an experience with flood waters? How did that turn out?
4. Are you a good liar? How do you know?

Study Questions:

1. What is the difference between transgression, sin, and iniquity?
2. What is deceit? Is it possible to lie while telling the truth?
3. What are the physical, emotional, and relational consequences of unconfessed sin (vss. 3-4)?
4. Read James 5:16. What is the value of confessing our sins to another person in addition to God?
5. What examples of "covering" can we see throughout the Bible? How do these demonstrate God's forgiveness of our sin in Christ?
6. In the New Testament, the words *justification* (Romans 5:6-9), *atonement* (Romans 3:21-26; 1 John 2:2), and *reconciliation* (2 Corinthians 5:17-21) describe how God deals with our sin through Jesus Christ. What does each of these words mean in expressing the fullness of God's grace when it comes to our sin?
7. Read Psalm 103:8-12. What does it tell us about how God deals with us and our sin?
8. In verse 7, David writes that the LORD surrounds him with loud songs of deliverance. Who do you think is singing here?
9. What does the example of the horse and mule teach us about human nature?

Application Questions:

1. Why is it so tempting to cover up our sin rather than reveal it?
2. When have you confessed your sin to another person? How was it different from confessing your sin to God? Would you recommend it?
3. Do you have trouble believing that God has truly forgiven you? What would it take for you to trust Him on this?
4. Knowing that God has forgiven you, how should this affect your forgiveness of others? Has it?
5. What "songs of deliverance" have you been surrounding yourself with lately?
6. What aspect of your nature could use more "control"?

Other psalms of confession: 6, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143

Session 4: When you are angry, the LORD hears (Psalm 4)

Summary: At times the psalmist expresses his anger at his enemies. These prayers for justice are expressions of the psalmist's demand for God to make things right. While the language can be harsh at times, these psalms remind us that while anger can be justified, it must be appropriately managed. In Psalm 4, David asks God to intervene with justice on his behalf and help him to rest at night.

Background: The historical context of Psalm 4 is uncertain, but its similarities with Psalm 3 suggest that the two psalms were written at the same time, during Absalom's rebellion. David experienced the threat of losing his life and all of his family at the hands of his rebellious son. You can read about these events in 2 Samuel 15-18. David's heartbreak at his son's betrayal must have been unimaginable, and with a mixture of anger as well as hope for justice and mercy, he penned this psalm.

Opening Questions:

1. When was the last time you were angry? How did it turn out?
2. Are you more of an optimist or a pessimist?
3. Have you ever had someone be disloyal to you? How did you handle it? Would you have done anything differently in hindsight?

Study Questions:

1. What four things does David ask of the LORD in the first verse?
2. What does David seem to be angry at (vs. 2)? What does it mean that they are turning his glory into shame?
3. Knowing what you do about David's situation, do you think his anger is justified?
4. Is David addressing himself in vs. 4? Or someone else?
5. How does the instruction to "search your hearts and be silent" relate to controlling anger (vs. 4)?
6. Read Mark 3:1-6; John 2:13-17; Mark 11:15-17. Why was Jesus' anger justified? How did he express his anger?
7. How does Paul further illuminate this teaching in Ephesians 4:25-32?
8. What does it mean to "offer right sacrifices" (vs. 5)?
9. What changed over the course of the eight verses of this psalm—the behavior of David's enemies or David's attitude toward them?

Application Questions:

1. Are you more likely to explode in anger or smolder for a while first?
2. Do you deal with anger differently depending on the context? At work? At home? With friends?
3. What are the things that trigger your anger?
4. This psalm offers many solutions for managing anger. Which is the most difficult for you: searching *your* heart, being silent, yielding your rights, trusting God, or going to bed and sleeping peacefully?
5. When you are angry, how is it helpful to know that the LORD hears?
6. It's been said that "bitterness is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die." If you are continually angry at someone, what do you need to do to move your heart from bitterness to forgiveness?

Other psalms of anger: 7, 35, 55, 58, 59, 69, 79, 83, 109, 137

Session 5: When you are weary, the LORD gives you rest (Psalm 62)

Summary: Augustine wrote, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” The pursuit of rest in the modern age can be exhausting. In spite of our labor-saving devices, holidays, and vacations, Americans say that they are more weary than ever with anxiety, depression, and loneliness at record levels. Psalm 62 offers us a path to ultimate rest for the soul.

Background: While we can’t be certain when David wrote this psalm, the content suggests that he was weary. Even on the best of days, David had all of the stress that goes with being king, leading a country, serving as a judge, and being a father and husband with a very dysfunctional family. The psalm describes men who were trying to topple him (vs. 3), using slander and curses to do so (vs. 4). For more context, read Psalms 61-64, a group of four psalms of trust, similar in length and content to one another.

Opening Questions:

1. On a level of 1-10, what is your stress level right now?
2. What keeps you awake at night these days?
3. What is the most restful vacation you’ve had in the last ten years? What made it so?
4. How do you deal with stressful situations? Fight back? Retreat? Whistle and walk on?

Study Questions:

1. What were some of the causes of David’s restlessness?
2. The Hebrew word “*ak*” (translated *only, alone, surely*) occurs six times in this psalm as the first word of verses 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 9. What do you think is the effect of this repetition and position at the beginning of each of those lines of poetry?
3. David seems to be telling himself to rest. How can self-talk help us “find rest”?
4. Read Matthew 11:28-30. How do Jesus’ words both echo and complete those of David?
5. In what way is the rest that Jesus offers us greater than that which David experienced?
6. What are the dangers of trusting in your social status? (vs. 9) in your wealth (vs. 10)?
7. What two things has David heard about God (vs. 11)? Are these in conflict with one another or do they complement one another?
8. How will God judge (vs. 12)? See also Romans 2:6-8; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Matthew 16:27. Is this in conflict with God’s grace?

Application Questions:

1. What circumstances, people, or forces are pressuring you now? What are you learning from their pressure?
2. How can you know if you trust in God or in money?
3. Have you ever blessed someone with your lips and cursed them in your heart?
4. In what do you trust ultimately: yourself, your reputation, others, wealth, power?
5. When was the last time you poured your heart out to God? What was the result?
6. In finding rest for his soul, David reminds himself of these qualities of God: my rock, my salvation, my fortress, my hope, my glory, my refuge. Which of these qualities do you need most right now?
7. How consistent are you at practicing “sabbath”, reserving a day of the week for rest? What would it take to make this a habit?

Other psalms of rest: 3, 4, 11, 16, 23, 31, 34, 57, 61, 63, 92, 116, 130, 131

Session 6: When you are lonely, the LORD moves in with you (Psalm 42-43)

Summary: Recent surveys indicate that in spite of the many ways modern technology enables personal connection, people say they increasingly feel lonely and isolated. This is particularly true for younger people. In Psalm 42-43, the writer expresses his grief at the isolation he feels while being from his homeland as he remembers the experiences there that brought him happiness. He reminds himself that better days are ahead and he resolves to trust in God in the meantime.

Background: Psalm 42-43 was likely composed by a priest who had been taken captive during a foreign invasion and was now living far from his home in Jerusalem. While the psalm was divided into two parts (Psalms 42 and 43), there are actually three choruses that link the two together with the central verse in 42:8. The psalm begins with life-threatening grief and concludes with a hopeful prayer for the future. It contains one of the best examples of “self talk” in the entire Book of Psalms.

Opening Questions:

1. Remember a time when you were homesick. How did you deal with it?
2. Describe a time when you were really thirsty.
3. What is your favorite thirst-quenching beverage?
4. Do you find yourself talking to yourself often? What do you talk about?

Study Questions:

1. What is the psalmist's condition in 42:1-3? How is he doing in 42:7? Is he any better in 42:9-10?
2. What does the psalmist assume about God in 42:9? Why?
3. Twice the psalmist is taunted with the question, “Where is your God?” (42:3,10) Who is taunting him? What is the effect on him?
4. What prescription to his grief does the psalmist offer himself in 42:5,11 and 43:5? Is this a realistic way to handle grief?
5. What is the psalmist learning about God, even though he is not in his house? (42:8)
6. The psalmist addresses God in several different terms: the living God (2x), my Savior (3x), the LORD (YHWH), my rock, and the God of my life. What does each of these say about God's relationship with the psalmist?
7. Do you think things have gotten better for the psalmist by the end of the psalm? Does his mood change any? Why?
8. Read John 4:20-24. How does Jesus answer the question, “Where is your God?”

Application Questions:

1. If you were asked the question, “Where is your God?” How would you respond?
2. The psalmist twice asks, “When can I go and meet with God?” (42:2). How does the New Testament answer this question? John 2:19-21; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
3. What does it mean to meet God in the person of Christ? To meet God in the church? To meet God in the Holy Spirit?
4. What wisdom from this psalm helps you when you experience loneliness?
5. What “self talk” will you use next time you are feeling isolated?

Other psalms about God's presence: 15, 23, 46, 68, 73, 77, 84, 90, 113, 118, 124, 139

Session 7: When you are sick, the LORD will raise you up (Psalm 30)

Summary: Sickness is a universal human experience. While the human body is wonderfully designed, our experience with sickness is a reminder of our mortality. In Genesis 3:17-19 the Bible teaches that sickness is a result of the curse due to the sin of Adam (who represents mankind), and it serves as a prelude to death. Many psalms describe the symptoms of sickness, often relating it to the root problem of sin, and the psalmist appeals to God for healing. Psalm 30 is David's song of thanksgiving after being raised up from his deathbed, pointing to the ultimate resurrection from death for all who believe in Jesus.

Background: In the Old Testament, sickness was always seen as a consequence of sin. When the psalmist prays for healing it is often accompanied by confession of his sin. Seven psalms are identified as *penitential* psalms, that is, they are prayers of repentance from sin (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). They all assert that physical suffering is a result of sin. Jesus changes this paradigm when he says that ultimately sickness provides an opportunity for God to be glorified (John 9:3). The Hebrew word *Sheol* refers to the realm of the dead, the place where everyone goes when they die. Everyone enters *Sheol* through the gates of death.

Opening Questions:

1. When was the last time you were sick? Did you pray for healing?
2. Have you ever experienced miraculous healing? Do you know someone who has?

Study Questions:

1. Read Psalm 39:4-6. What metaphors does David use to describe human life?
2. Read Genesis 3:17-19. What are the consequences of Adam's sin for the human race? Does this seem fair based on what Adam did (ate a piece of fruit)? Why or why not?
3. Read Psalm 6:1-5 and Psalm 38:1-11. Which descriptions of his pain stand out to you? Who does David blame for his pain?
4. Read Psalm 102:3-11. Describe the psalmist's physical condition. What are the relational and social effects of his illness?
5. Can you think of some examples of the connection between sin and sickness? Are there sinful behaviors that can result in sickness?
6. Read John 9:1-3, John 11:1-4, and Luke 5:17-26. What observations can you make about Jesus' teaching on sin, sickness, and disability?
7. How does Jesus' death on the cross reverse the consequences of sin? (Galatians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 53:4-12)
8. Read Revelation 21:1-4 and 22:1-3. What correspondence do you see in these passages and Genesis 3:17-19?

Application Questions:

1. Read James 5:13-18. Discuss the relationship between sickness, sin, prayer, and healing.
2. Why do you think God allows us to experience physical challenges?
3. How can these penitential psalms help us pray when we are in pain?
4. Is it nighttime or morning for you right now (30:5)? In what ways does Psalm 30 give you hope?

Psalms about sickness: 6, 38, 39, 41, 69, 102, 143

Psalms about resurrection: 30, 40, 68, 103, 116, 118

Session 8: When you are grateful, give thanks to the LORD for he is good (Psalm 107)

Summary: Psalm 107 presents four scenarios in which YHWH saves people from their distress. Each of the four scenes is structured the same way: an expression of the need of the people, their crying out to God, YHWH's rescue of them, and then their thanksgiving. The psalm concludes with a fifth section restating the principle of how God in his justice and love reverses various life situations and is therefore worthy of our gratitude.

Background: Psalm 107 is the first psalm of Book 5, and it serves as an introduction to this final group of 44 psalms. The primary theme of Book 5 is "Hallelujah! The LORD saves!" In general, these psalms celebrate the various ways that YHWH has saved his people beginning with the exodus (113-118), the giving of the law (119), and his presence with them through the seasons of life (the songs of ascents, 120-134). Book 5 concludes with five psalms of doxology (146-150).

Opening Questions:

1. Describe a time when you were lost. Did you ask for directions or figure it out on your own?
2. How good are you at asking for help?
3. Have you ever had a near-death experience?

Study Questions:

1. The phrase, "the steadfast love [*hesed*] of the LORD endures forever" is the most common phrase in the Psalms. What does it mean?
2. What does it mean to be redeemed (vss. 2-3)?
3. Why would people in the ancient world find themselves homeless and hungry? (vss. 4-7)
4. What types of homelessness and hunger exist in the world today? How is the church in your community addressing their needs?
5. Describe the plight of the prisoners in vss. 10-14. How does the LORD rescue them?
6. What types of prisoners exist in the world today? How is the church in your community addressing their needs?
7. What are the symptoms of the sin-sick in vss. 17-20?
8. Who are the sin-sick in the world today? How is the church in your community offering healing?
9. In each of these three scenarios (wandering, imprisoned, and sin-sick), what is required for change to begin?
10. How is the danger on the sea different from the first three scenarios?
11. How do these four scenarios point us to the ministry of Jesus?

Application Questions:

1. Which of these four groups do you most identify with today? Lost, in bondage, sin-sick, seasick in the storms of life?
2. What keeps you from crying out to God for help?
3. The response to God's salvation includes giving thanks, offering sacrifices, singing joyful songs, and public worship and witness. Which of these comes more easily for you?
4. God saves people today through the work of the church and through the preaching of the gospel. What are you doing to address the needs of the lost, imprisoned, sin-sick, and seasick?

Other psalms of thanksgiving: 9, 18, 34, 65, 100, 118, 135, 136, 138, 144, 145

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