



## DISCOVERY TEACHER'S GUIDE

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Psalms



## The Way of Wisdom

Proverbs 1:1—9:18

### The Proverbs of Solomon

Proverbs 10:1—22:16

### The Words of the Wise

Proverbs 22:17—24:34

## **A Collection of Proverbs**

Proverbs 25:1-31:31

## The Book of Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes 1:1 — 12:14

## The Song of Solomon

Song of Solomon 1:1—8:14

#### **Book I of The Psalms**

Psalms 1:1—41:13

## The Shepherd's Psalm

Psalm 23:1-6

#### **Book II of The Psalms**

Psalms 42:1—72:20

### **Book III of The Psalms**

Psalms 73:1—89:52

#### **Book IV of The Psalms**

Psalms 90:1 — 106:48

#### The Great Psalm

Psalm 119:1-176

## **Book V of The Psalms**

Psalms 107:1—150:6

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anxiety, or dread. Rather, "the fear of the LORD"

## 444

## The Way of Wisdom

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
Proverbs 1:1 through 9:18	
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge:	-
but fools despise wisdom and instruction." (Proverbs 1:7)	
BACKGROUND	
The Book of Proverbs is made up of several collections of concise sayings—frequently in couplet form—that contain moral truths and practical instruction for a truly successful, happy life. The first collection is found in Chapters 1–9.  These chapters consist of fatherly advice given by King Solomon to his son and the young men of Israel on the topic of wisdom. Since the proverbs were drawn from the king's personal experience, this is the most conversational, narrative, and thematic portion of the book. Solomon's purpose was to guide the youth of Israel into an understanding of why wisdom should be valued and folly despised.  Biblical proverbs are not universal in scope nor applicable in every instance. However, the adages and instruction in these chapters relate to our era, as they have to every generation. All who seek true wisdom can benefit from these spiritual insights which point to the Source, value, and benefits of wisdom, as true wisdom and knowledge come from and represent God.  The introduction to the book appears in verses 1-7 of chapter 1. The purpose is succinctly stated in verse 2: "to know wisdom and instruction." From 1:8 through 9:18, Solomon developed the superiority of wisdom over foolishness through a series of admonitions related to wise living, and explanations as to what that entails. Since wisdom is a concept not	
easily captured in words, he frequently employed the technique of showing how a wise person behaves,	
rather than describing wisdom itself.	NOTES
SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS  4. Salaman annuaged the major them a of the Deals	NOTES
<b>1.</b> Solomon expressed the major theme of the Book of Proverbs in our focus verse, which states that "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge." The word <i>beginning</i> as used here means "the first and controlling principle." Given that perspective, how would you define or describe the "fear of the LORD"?	
Class responses should bring out that the word "fear" in this context does not imply apprehension,	

means to honor and respect God, and to live in constant awareness and awe of His power.

You may wish to follow up by asking your class how the fear of the Lord will be reflected in our lives. They should conclude that it will mean making God the foundation for our understanding of the world, our attitudes, and our actions. We will also be careful to be obedient to Him.

**2.** In the opening statement of Solomon's discourse (Proverbs 1:1-6), he used a variety of words which are synonymous or closely related to the word "wisdom." What are some of these words, and why do you think he employed so many different ways of describing wisdom?

Synonyms, or words related in meaning to "wisdom," include instruction, understanding, discretion, knowledge, learning, and wise counsels. No doubt Solomon used this variety in order to expand and reinforce the point that true wisdom is not simply amassing information. It is an intrinsic core attitude that affects every aspect of life.

A deeper look at some of the shades of meaning found in these Hebrew words may be interesting to your class, and will provide a broader perspective of what Solomon was referring to in his many references to wisdom. The word translated "wisdom" is the most inclusive term. It depicts a combination of thoughtful observation, careful obedience, prudent conduct, and alertness to God's will. "Instruction" includes the concepts of correction and discipline. "Understanding" reflects looking to the heart of a matter and being mindful of the impact of the choices being weighed. "Discretion" conveys the thought of careful and wise planning. "Knowledge" implies understanding and doing what God requires fervently and consistently. "Learning" is growth or progress in the comprehension of truth. "Wise counsel" has to do with accurate guidance.

Summarizing these words might lead to describing wisdom as being insight into the underlying causes, significance, and consequences of decisions, actions, and behaviors, which enables us to apply knowledge daily.

**3.** Proverbs 1:20-33 is the first of many times in the Book of Proverbs where wisdom is personified in feminine terms. In this section, wisdom spoke in the first person and referred to the reader as "my child." How would you summarize the warning given in these verses?

These verses warn of the danger of turning away from the call of God, ignoring His counsel, and failing to heed His reproof. God gives opportunities to repent to all, including those with varying degrees of hardness of heart. However, such opportunities do not last forever. Those who continue to ignore

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God's call will find no help outside of God's mercy when calamity comes, and will ultimately suffer eternal punishment for their continued rejection of God. Conversely, verse 33 holds out hope: those who hearken "shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil."

**4.** The words "My son...," which open chapter 2, mark the beginning of a new theme. Verses 1-5 present an if – then form of argument: *If* you meet the conditions (described in verses 1-4), *then* you can be certain of the result (described in verse 5). Briefly state the conditions and the result described in this passage.

The condition described in verses 1-4 is a heartfelt, focused, single-hearted devotion to discovering and doing what is right. The result in verse 5 is that individuals with that type of devotion will know what to do to please God and how to do it.

Follow up by asking your class why it is so vital to know how to please God. The reason is given in successive verses—living in this manner connects us with the grace and power of God. Notice the verbs which indicate God's grace: He "giveth" (verse 6), He "layeth up" (verse 7), He "keepeth" and "preserveth" (verse 8). Ultimately, God will lead those who honor Him in "every good path" (see verse 9).

**5.** In chapter 3 Solomon continued to press home the merits of wisdom, outlining six principles for having a good life. Summarize the principles in the following verses:

You may wish to make a list of the principles on a flipchart or dry erase board. They could be summarized as follows:

Proverbs 3:1-2—A long and peaceful life comes by heeding godly counsel.

Proverbs 3:3-4—We obtain favor with God and others if we are merciful and truthful.

Proverbs 3:5-6—We will obtain the best direction if we allow the Lord to guide us.

Proverbs 3:7-8—We benefit by staying away from evil and arrogance.

Proverbs 3:9-10—*Those who give tithes and offerings receive God's blessing.* 

Proverbs 3:11-12—We benefit from God's discipline when we understand that He administers it because He loves and cares for us.

This would be a good time to reinforce the point stated in our lesson background—Biblical proverbs are not universal in scope, nor applicable in every instance. While they present a general truth, they do not offer a guarantee. For example, consider Proverbs 3:7-8. A person may have been faithful to avoid evil and arrogance, but still suffer from poor health.

**6.** What visual illustration did Solomon use in Proverbs 4:10-19 to portray the importance of wisdom? What specific words contribute to his analogy?

The visual illustration Solomon used was that of two paths: one being the path of wisdom, and the other the path of the wicked. Words such as way, led, steps, run, stumble, and go all contribute to the analogy. You might wish to give the members of your class a printout of verses 10-19, and together identify and circle these words.

Solomon described the results of taking each path. It could be mentioned that wisdom continues to increase as we remain on the path of the just—it builds upon itself. You may wish to draw your students' attention to verse 18, which portrays the path of the righteous as being one of progressive brightness. We often have heard veterans of the Gospel testify that serving the Lord grows sweeter every day. This is certainly true for those who make a full commitment to serving God with all of their hearts. If your class members have served God for many years, this would be a good opportunity to ask them to share specific ways they have experienced their way growing brighter as they draw nearer the goal.

7. Earlier in his discourse on wisdom, Solomon warned of being delivered from an immoral woman (see Proverbs 2:16-20). In chapter 5 verses 5-14 we read of the peril of sexual sin, and in chapters 6 and 7, similar warnings are repeated. Why do you think Solomon repeatedly addressed this topic?

Class discussion will likely bring out that the frequent repetition indicates the danger is great. Sexual sin was a serious problem in Solomon's day, and certainly is no less serious today. Many have learned to their sorrow that one thoughtless action can bring a lifetime of regret. No doubt Solomon wanted to impress upon his listeners that the best time to learn the dangers of immorality is before temptation comes.

A good follow-up might be to ask your class to list several steps that we can take to avoid sexual temptation and keep our lives pure. Depending upon the age of your class, discussion could go beyond the perils of physical unfaithfulness. This would be a good opportunity to discuss the dangers that exist in today's society related to electronic communication, such as inappropriate texting and emailing with those of the opposite gender, easy access to pornography, or engaging in an emotional affair through social media sites.

**8.** Chapter 9, the conclusion of Solomon's wisdom speeches, reviews the major themes already spelled out in the first eight chapters of the book. How does verse 10 of this chapter summarize Solomon's message in these nine introductory chapters to the Book of Proverbs?

Verse 10 states: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding." Once again, Solomon was stating his basic premise: to be truly wise, the fear of the Lord must be the fundamental and preeminent principle of our lives. "Knowledge of the holy" can only be built upon the foundation of a personal relationship with God. When getting to know God better is the defining purpose of our lives, we will continue to learn and grow in wisdom. Discussion of this principle could be an excellent way to wrap up your class session.

## CONCLUSION

While wisdom and folly vie for our allegiance, the ultimate choice lies with us. Which call will we			
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## The Proverbs of Solomon

help in every part of life and bring eternal benefits as

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
Proverbs 10:1 through 22:16	OI LIVER
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!" (Proverbs 16:16)	
BACKGROUND	
This central section of the Book of Proverbs (Proverbs 10:1 through Proverbs 22:16) contains the bulk of the sayings which the Israelites attributed to King Solomon. Both this and the first section begin with the same four words: "The proverbs of Solomon" These maxims offer practical wisdom for godly living applicable at every stage of life.  Five major themes in which virtues are contrasted with their corresponding vices are the focus of this portion of the book.  Over sixty verses contrast righteousness with wickedness.  Approximately sixty verses contrast wisdom with foolishness.  More than fifty verses contrast good conversation with evil speaking.  Over forty verses contrast riches with poverty.  Approximately twenty verses contrast diligence with laziness.  While references to these themes appear throughout the section, Solomon did not group the proverbs by theme. Rather, he moved from one subject to another in a natural order, similar to a conversation. For example, one proverb might explain the previous one. Another proverb might contrast with the previous one.  A variety of stand-alone proverbs are also found in these twelve chapters. Most are couplets—two sentences or phrases in one verse. In the majority of these, the parallelism is antithetic (the two phrases are directly opposed to each other).	
SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS	NOTES
1. The key verse, Proverbs 16:16, states that it is better to get wisdom than to get gold, and that understanding is to be chosen over silver. Why is this true? Why are wisdom and understanding so valuable?  Your class should conclude that material wealth	
is perishable, while true wisdom and understanding	

well. Wealth can purchase material goods, but cannot purchase satisfaction, righteousness, peace, long life, or the blessings of God. While those who obtain true wisdom and understanding may or may not receive material benefits, they are guaranteed spiritual blessings that are more valuable than gold or silver. Wisdom and understanding, which includes coming to the knowledge of salvation, bring true satisfaction and enrich the soul. You might wish to point out that Solomon—who was a very wealthy man and thus could speak with authority on this topic—made this statement of comparison with great assurance. The exclamatory phrase, "How much better ...!" indicates that as he pondered this, he was amazed at the disproportion. **2.** The wisdom contained in these proverbs is presented in several distinct literary forms. In an antithetical (contrasting) proverb, a virtue identified in the first part of the proverb is contrasted with a corresponding vice in the second part, or vice-versa. A synonymous (amplifying) proverb repeats and reaffirms the same thought in different words. A synthetic (explanatory) proverb presents one thought in an initial section and then explains or completes this thought in the concluding portion. Using these descriptions, identify which literary form is used in each of the following proverbs. Your students should identify these literary forms: Proverbs 14:12—explain Proverbs 14:19—amplify Proverbs 14:34—contrast You could use the following verses as a group activity, having class members read a proverb aloud and identify its form. Proverbs 10:12—contrast Proverbs 10:22—explain *Proverbs 11:7—amplify Proverbs* 12:22—contrast Proverbs 15:3—explain *Proverbs 15:23—amplify* Proverbs 15:29—contrast Proverbs 16:18—amplify Proverbs 16:31—explain Proverbs 17:22—contrast Proverbs 17:28—amplify Proverbs 18:10—explain *Proverbs* 19:5—amplify Proverbs 20:22—explain Proverbs 22:3—contrast **3.** Over sixty verses in this section of Proverbs contrast the righteous with the wicked. In the

following verses, what are the positive consequences of righteousness and the negative consequences of wickedness? Proverbs 10:6; 11:19; 12:2; 15:29

Proverbs 10:6 promises blessings to the righteous, but violence to the wicked. Proverbs 11:19 states that the righteous will enjoy life, but the wicked will die. Proverbs 12:2 brings out that the Lord's favor will rest upon the righteous, but He will condemn the wicked. Proverbs 15:29 indicates that the prayers of the righteous will be heard while the prayers of the wicked will be ignored.

You may wish to amplify your students' answers by bringing out that consequences can be divided into two categories: physical/material consequences and spiritual consequences. These proverbs illustrate that in both areas, righteousness is man's best security.

You may wish to point out that passages which allude to wealth and prosperity as being rewards for the righteous should not be interpreted as teaching that following God is a way to obtain material benefits. While the righteous may or may not be blessed with prosperity, those in this category are assured of a glorious eternity.

**4.** Approximately sixty verses in this section of Proverbs contrast wisdom and folly. Several of these proverbs point out the importance of listening to instruction, or receiving counsel (see Proverbs 12:15; 15:5; 17:10; and 19:20). Why is this so important?

Class response to this question will likely bring out that we can obtain deep spiritual insights by drawing from the experiences and wise counsel of the godly. In this information age, knowledge is plentiful, but true wisdom is scarce. When wisdom is presented to us through the wise instruction and counsel of the godly, we will benefit if we take heed.

As a follow-up, ask your students to share examples of times when they were given good instruction and benefitted by heeding it. Be prepared with a personal example.

**5.** Words have power. They can damage and destroy, or encourage and build up. The contrast between good words and evil speaking is also a focus of this section. What positive aspects of good speech are brought out in Proverbs 12:25; 15:23; and 16:24?

Proverbs 12:25 brings out that a "good word" makes a heart glad. Ask your class to name some types of good words that we can employ. They will likely mention encouragement, commendation, appreciation, and most importantly, pointing others to God.

In Proverbs 15:23, Solomon addressed the value of a word spoken "in due season." Often when we speak is as important as what we say. Point out that the Spirit of God can direct us as to the appropriate timing of our words.


Proverbs 16:24 compares pleasant words to a honeycomb, and states that they are "sweet to the soul." This might be an opportunity for your class members to relate times when someone's words were especially uplifting or encouraging to them.

Lead your class to conclude that each of us no doubt has opportunities every day to speak words that will uplift and encourage someone. Not only will the individual we address be blessed, but we will be as well!

**6.** Another frequent topic in this section of Proverbs is the contrast between riches and poverty, the rich and the poor. Find at least one example and cite the principle which the verse you chose expresses.

You may wish to make a list with your class of the verses your students offer and the principles these verses express. Some options include:

Proverbs 11:25—Those who share their wealth will be blessed in return.

Proverbs 11:28—Do not put trust in riches or wealth.

Proverbs 15:27—Do not be greedy as that brings trouble

Proverbs 16:8—It is better to be poor and good than rich and evil.

Proverbs 22:16—Those who oppress the poor will become needy themselves.

Point out that how we handle our material resources matters in terms of our spiritual lives. Not only did Solomon reference this frequently in Proverbs, but God gave much instruction in the rest of Scripture as well about how we should earn, save, and spend our money.

**7.** Over twenty verses in this section of Proverbs contrast diligence and laziness. A "sluggard" is a lazy or slothful person, and he is contrasted with a diligent or hardworking person. What are some reasons to be diligent and hardworking? Proverbs 10:4-5; 19:15

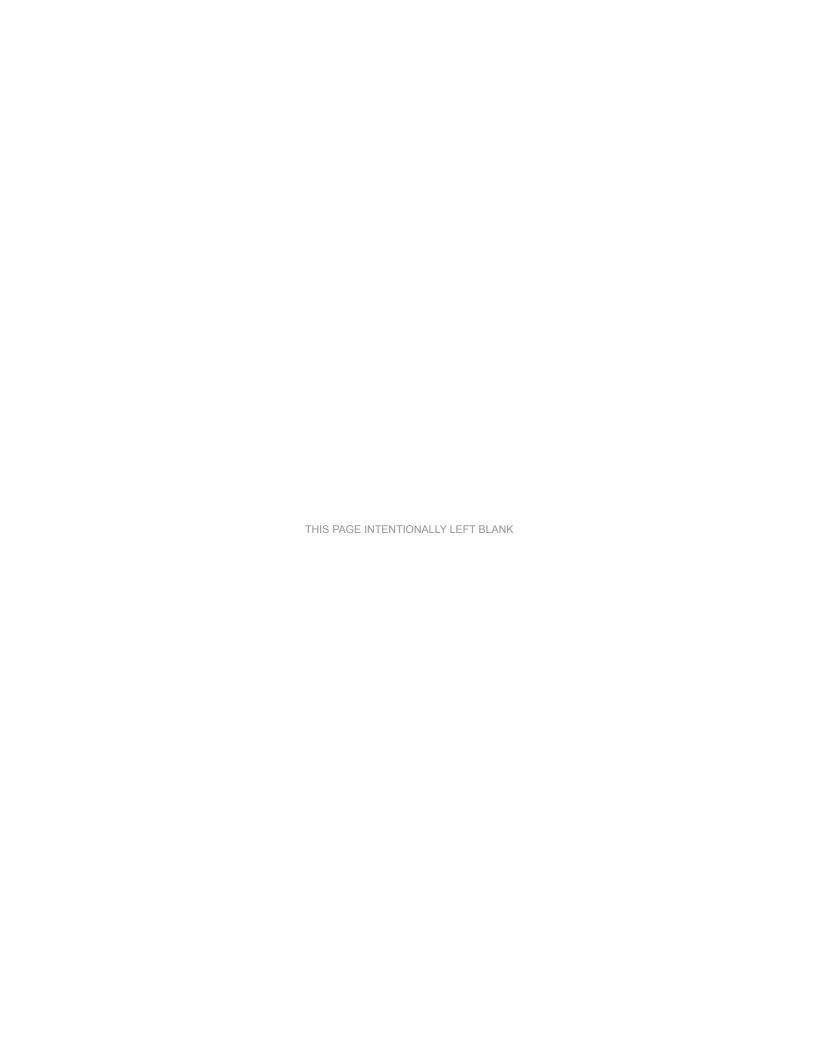
Proverbs 10:4 and 19:15 bring out that diligence is needed in order to have life's necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter. Proverbs 10:5 indicates that diligence results in one having a good reputation. The point should be made that every day offers opportunities to be productive in one way or another. We are accountable to carry out our work with diligence and discipline, not laziness—that is part of effective and wise living.

If you wish to amplify this topic further, your class could look up the following verses together and discuss what motivation to work hard and be diligent is brought out by each verse.

Proverbs 10:26—A desire to avoid displeasing a supervisor.

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Proverbs $12:27$ —A desire to take care of what one has.	
Proverbs $14:23-A$ desire to avoid laboring in vain.	
Proverbs 20:4—To avoid being reduced to begging.	
Proverbs 20:13—To avoid poverty.	
<b>8.</b> Why are the five major themes developed in this section of Proverbs still so applicable today? (See the summary in the lesson background.)	
Your class should conclude that righteousness and wickedness, wisdom and foolishness, good words and	
evil speaking, riches and poverty, and diligence and	
laziness are still applicable today because they are timeless themes that have impact in every culture and	
era. In our day as in Solomon's time, positive virtues	
still bring positive results, and negative vices still	
bring negative results. Across the ages of time, people	
gain when they apply these principles to their lives.	
<b>9.</b> Which of the proverbs in today's text spoke most directly to your heart, and why?	
Since our text covers a range of different topics,	
there is no correct answer to this question. Encourage your students to explain how the verse they chose	
applies to their own lives. Be prepared to share a	
personal response to this question with your class.	
CONCLUSION	
As we study Proverbs, may God help us to discover the nuggets of wisdom which will most	
enrich our souls and enlighten our minds. These precious jewels of knowledge are of great value when	
they are applied to our own hearts and lives!	
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## The Words of the Wise

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
Proverbs 22:17 through 24:34	
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set." (Proverbs 22:28)	
BACKGROUND	
Our text contains two collections of moral and religious teachings applicable to people of all ages and walks of life: the first and longer collection is found in Proverbs 22:17 through Proverbs 24:22, and the second collection in Proverbs 24:23-34.  The plural form of the word "wise" in the phrase "hear the words of the wise" (Proverbs 22:17) is an indicator that wise men other than King Solomon authored the first section, although he collected the sayings. Proverbs 24:23 marks the start of the second collection with the statement, "These things also belong to the wise" No reference is made to Solomon in either of these collections.  Three groups of teachers comprised the wise men of Israel: the priests, sages, and prophets. Each of these groups had a different purpose. The priests were responsible for instruction regarding the Torah (Israel's written and oral law), the sages gave counsel, and the prophets proclaimed the words of God. It is the counsel of the sages that is recorded in this section of Proverbs.  This portion of Proverbs more closely resembles the father/son or teacher/student style of teaching in chapters 1-9 than the two-line couplets of the Proverbs 10:1 through 22:16 section covered in the previous lesson. There are frequent calls to attention scattered throughout the text (see Proverbs 22:17; 23:19, 22, 26). Most of the proverbs reflect a tone of admonition which is indicated by imperative verbs and direct address.	
SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS	NOTES
1. In Proverbs 22:28, our key verse, a prohibition was given regarding moving established landmarks. When the Israelites conquered Canaan, each tribe was given a portion of land with defined boundaries. Prior to that time, Moses had warned the people not to move the landmarks establishing property boundaries once they reached the Promised Land (see Deuteronomy 19:14; 27:17). The landmarks were how each family would maintain possession of the exact property allotted to them. How can the principle in this verse apply to our Christian lives?	

Class discussion should bring out that we live in a world where corruption, dishonesty, and immorality are increasingly commonplace. However, the principles of God's Word remain the same for every age and every culture. When society shifts, we must be very careful that we do not move our spiritual "landmarks"—the fundamental principles of right and wrong, and of good and evil—that were established by God.

You may wish to develop this point by asking your class to offer examples of Bible principles that do not change. They may offer examples such as the fact that salvation through Jesus Christ is the only way to Heaven, the necessity of living without sin, the Biblical account of Creation, God's plan that marriage be between one man and one woman for life, His prohibition against sexual impurity, etc.

**2.** Proverbs 22:24-25 mentions an "angry" man. How would you define the word *angry* in this context? Why do you think we are told not to spend much time with such people?

Your class should define an angry person as an individual who has little self-control and is prone toward rage, frustration, and explosions of temper.

In response to the second question, your students should recognize that these verses stress the danger of wrong associations. The word learn in verse 25 actually means to "learn by association." We will tend to adopt the characteristics of those we spend time with, and if we associate with uncontrolled and violent people, it will be a snare to our souls for we will experience repercussions from evil practices.

Point out to your class that the same caution applies to other negative traits as well. If we listen to complaining, we will find it more difficult to be thankful. If we spend undue time with those who are bitter, we likely will learn to hold grudges. Discuss the benefits of spending time with those who have a positive outlook, desire to please God, and are interested in talking about Him and His Word. This kind of association will generate positive results.

**3.** The wise men of Israel warned against envying sinners. What reason is given (Proverbs 23:17-18)? How can this help shape the focus for our lives?

These verses bring out that there is an end to consider. Even when sinners seem to be in an enviable position, there is much more to life than one's existence on earth. If we consider the big picture, we see that Christians certainly have the very best. We may lack riches, beauty, fame, or power down here on earth, but we have an assurance of blessings that will last throughout eternity.

In response to the second question, your group should conclude that as we focus on Christ and eternal values, the allurements of the world will grow dim in comparison. Such a focus will help us to spend time

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making wise investments for eternity. These verses encourage us to concentrate on the end, rather than	
this short span of time on earth.	
<b>4.</b> How can we buy the truth and then refuse to sell it? Proverbs 23:23	
The word buy in this verse means "to procure; to obtain," and has the sense of procuring or obtaining	
through purchase. While we do not buy truth with monetary resources, there is a cost involved in	
obtaining it. Our hearts must hunger to know the truth—even truth about ourselves—and be willing to	
surrender whatever God calls for in order to obtain it.	
As we search God's Word, we will begin to understand Him and what He desires. We should meditate on and	
memorize His precepts. And above all, we must obey the Word. As we accept it into our hearts and lives,	
even when the "sword" cuts us, we will be buying the	
truth. Once we buy the truth, we must refuse to "sell" it by guarding and preserving it, and by never rejecting	
or compromising a precept from God's Word.  Popular thought in the world today is that truth is	
not absolute but relative—that what is truth for one	
person may be different for someone else. It is vital for us to understand that there is only one truth, and	
it is found in God's Word. Every philosophy, teaching, or perspective, must be measured by God's Word to	
determine if it is right or wrong.	
<b>5.</b> What do you think the "house" referenced in Proverbs 24:3-4 represents? What principle is this	
proverb teaching?	
Some Bible scholars suggest the word "house" is symbolic of the family, and others feel it references a	
man's character. In either case, the principle clearly	
is that careful application of wisdom will result in a solid foundation for living. Not only will the wise	
individual's house be "established" (solid and secure), but "precious and pleasant riches" (evidence that the	
individual is blessed by God) will fill its rooms.	
Amplify this point by discussing specific ways we can build our houses through wisdom. If the house	
symbolizes family, specific ways could include carefully teaching our children the ways of God, honoring	
Him in the activities of the home, making sure we	
follow Biblical principles of behavior, maintaining a	
respect for things holy, having regular times of family worship, tithing, etc. If we identify the house as a	
symbol of Christian character, we can build it through	
careful study of God's Word and the application of the principles of wisdom found therein. In either case, the	
result will be the blessing of God upon our houses,	
and His approval of our efforts to build in a manner pleasing to Him.	

**6.** Proverbs 24:6 points to the benefits that accrue to the one who listens to the counsel of the wise. When attempting to find God's will in important decisions,

why can it be helpful to seek advice from those we know are godly people? Proverbs 24:6

We should always first go to God's Word for guidance, and we should pray for God's Spirit to direct us. However, the counsel of godly men and women can point us in the right direction and give us confidence that we are making wise decisions. Godly people who have been through experiences similar to ours are in a position to give good counsel. We can benefit from their wise instruction and their warnings of pitfalls.

For young people, it is often godly parents who are the primary advisors. For others it may be a pastor, minister, or an "old-timer" in the Gospel. You may wish to ask individuals in your class to tell of times when they avoided pitfalls because they listened to good advice, or conversely, times when they endured negative consequences because they did not heed good advice.

**7.** In Proverbs 24:10 we read the observation, "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small." The sage was reminding his hearers that the time of crisis reveals our true mettle. How can we refrain from fainting or becoming discouraged when we face adversity?

Class suggestions will likely bring out the importance of keeping our focus upon God, reminding ourselves of His promises, and thinking of others in the Bible and in our own circles of acquaintances who have faced hard times and triumphed.

How we view adversity will make a difference regarding whether or not we faint. It is vital to remember that trials can work to our advantage. They can teach us to lean more upon the Lord—to appreciate and rest in His strength, and to prove the reliability of His promises. Many have found that God was the closest in their darkest nights. When we view our challenges as an opportunity to gain spiritual ground, we will find comfort and strength. Ultimately, those very experiences may provide us with opportunities to minister to others who face similar hard circumstances.

Your class may enjoy sharing times when trials ultimately brought good into their lives.

**8.** Throughout the Book of Proverbs we find numerous warnings against laziness, and encouragement to diligence. One example of such admonition is found in Proverbs 24:30-34, where the field of the sluggard is described as being overgrown with nettles and thorns. While diligence is unquestionably beneficial in physical labors, this word picture has application to our spiritual lives as well. Why is diligence necessary spiritually?

Class discussion should bring out that just as diligent labor brings material gain, diligence in spiritual matters brings spiritual gain. While our relationship with God is not based upon works, there are many Scriptures which point to the necessity of striving or investing effort in the Gospel. We must be diligent to resist the allurements of the world, quick to eliminate any negative attitudes or habits, and willing to keep the fields of our heart "plowed up" and ready to receive the seed of the Word of God.

The Bible is clear that we need to be consistent. We cannot grow weary in well doing; we must persevere. We must be instant in or out of season—ready at all times. There may be toil and tears. We may not see the results of our efforts in this life but some day, we will have sheaves to lay at the Master's feet. It will be worth it all!

## CONCLUSION

be even greater treasure awaiting us in Heaven.				

## Teacher's Guide



## **A Collection of Proverbs**

may address the same subject. While chapters 30 and 31 were authored by individuals other than Solomon, it is significant that their words were considered

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
Proverbs 25:1 through 31:31	
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but	
whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." (Proverbs 28:13)	
BACKGROUND	
Proverbs 25:1 marks the conclusion of proverbs of the wise men of Israel and the beginning of the third and final section of the Book of Proverbs.  According to this verse, the final proverbs authored by Solomon (chapters 25 through 29) were collected	
and copied by the aides of Hezekiah, King of Judah	
(715-686 B.C.), who restored the Temple some	
two hundred years after the time of Solomon. The word translated <i>copied</i> in this verse literally means	
"removed from one document to another," likely	
indicating that by the time of Hezekiah, the original	
documents were in poor condition and needed to	
be copied in order to preserve the teachings. It is	
possible that these men also incorporated some of	
the oral proverbs attributed to Solomon into their	
collection, along with those that had been written	
down. Chapter 30 was written by Agur, of whom little is known except that he was a wise teacher who may	
have come from the kingdom of Massa in northern	
Arabia. Chapter 31 was written by King Lemuel, who	
is believed to have been from the kingdom of Massa	
as well.	
This portion of the book contains a special	
emphasis on wisdom for leaders: it stresses the	
king's role and covers topics associated with royal	
responsibility and appropriate behavior of officials.	
Rather than reminding leaders what good conduct	
entails, many of these proverbs instruct the court in what behaviors to encourage in their leaders.	
Relationships with others is another common thread	
that runs throughout these chapters, with insight	
offered regarding one's association not only with	
rulers, but with fools, scoundrels, the poor, the	
wicked, and the righteous.	
Chapters 25 through 29 vary somewhat in style	
and form from the portions of the book attributed	
to Solomon. These proverbs are arranged more	
frequently by topic; at times several sequential verses	

worthy of inclusion in this collection. The Book of Proverbs ends with the beautiful portrait of a virtuous	
wife and mother written in the style of an acrostic	
poem—each of the twenty-two stanzas begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.	
SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS	NOTES
<b>1.</b> What advice is given in Proverbs 25:6-7, and how	
does it apply to us today?	
The proverb advises a person to refrain from sitting in a place of honor without being asked to do so.	
It makes the point that those who exalt themselves shall be abased and those who humble themselves shall be exalted.	
The proverb applies in our day because the love	
of approbation, which leads one to seek selfishly for	
advancement, still exists. If we put ourselves ahead of others, pride has gained a foothold in our lives. Class	
discussion should bring out that God hates pride. He	
tells us the haughty and proud will fall, so it is vital to guard against self-exaltation or self-promotion. God	
will bless those who are humble.	
<b>2.</b> Proverbs 25:11-12; 27:5-6; and 28:23 refer to the	
benefits of wise counsel and encouragement. Give an example of a time when the good advice of a	
godly friend helped you or someone you know avoid	
making a harmful mistake.	
Responses to this question will be personal in nature, but some in your class may be willing to	
share their personal experiences. Amplify the discus-	
sion by referring to Proverbs 27:17. Have this verse read aloud, and then ask the group to explain how	
iron sharpening iron is like friendship. It should be	
brought out that verbal exchanges between Christians can be a tremendous source of encouragement	
to one another. Conversations with other godly indi-	
viduals can clarify our thinking, refine and shape our thoughts, and stimulate new ideas. A similar thought	
is presented in the New Testament, where we are told	
to exhort one another daily (Hebrews 3:13).	
<b>3.</b> The counsel given in Proverbs 25:21 is straightforward: we are to treat our enemies with	
kindness by meeting their basic needs of food	
and water. Bible scholars differ somewhat in their explanations of how doing so will "heap coals of	
fire" on the heads of our adversaries (verse 22). It	
may indicate that kindness will melt hardened hearts or angry feelings. Others suggest that kindness will	
shame our enemies into contrition and repentance.	
However the original meaning is explained, Solomon was indicating that the most effective response to	
animosity is to do good in return. Why is this response	
so effective?	

Class discussion should bring out that a person who is treated kindly after being mean or disrespectful

to another will often feel ashamed. Kindness begets kindness. In addition, treating those who despitefully use us with graciousness and mercy provides an undeniable Christian witness, for a person who can treat his enemies in that manner surely has the love of God in his or her heart. The same principle is reiterated in the New Testament: Paul quotes this proverb in Romans 12:19-21, and Jesus himself taught us to pray for those who treat us harshly (see Matthew 5:44).

Your group may be able to offer examples of those who responded with kindness after being treated wrongly, and the positive results that ensued.

**4.** Proverbs 26:13-16 contains a series of four warnings regarding indolence. What descriptive word picture of a lazy person is given in Proverbs 26:14? What principle is developed in these four verses?

Proverbs 26:14 compares a lazy man turning on his bed to the creaking of a door turning on its hinges, possibly because one who is slothful is as attached to his bed as a door is attached to its hinges.

The prevailing thought of these verses is that a lazy person will find all manner of excuses for his indolence. Rather than explaining away or justifying a lack of effort, we should be diligent in whatever we undertake and not let challenges deter us from accomplishing our tasks, though it may not always be easy to persevere. Proverbs 27:23-27 is a good companion passage. It brings out that the one who pursues a good goal will have a harvest in the end, in contrast to the one who does not even try.

**5.** We are warned in Proverbs 27:1 against assertively stating what we will do in the future. How can realizing we have no guarantee of tomorrow help us have a proper respect and humility before God?

God is the only One who knows what tomorrow will bring, so to "boast" of what we will or will not do may reveal a lack of submission to Him, or an arrogant or presumptuous spirit. When a person refuses to seek the will of God in the plans he makes, he is relying upon his own abilities and discernment. How quickly that can become self-sufficiency and pride! One who seeks the Lord's will, makes plans with the Lord as his Guide, and acknowledges and submits to God's providential arrangement for his life is evidencing a proper respect and humility before the Lord.

**6.** Solomon has much to say about fools. According to Proverbs 28:26, what causes a person to become a fool? How can we avoid that and be wise?

Proverbs 28:26 says, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." Ask your class to explain what is meant by trusting in one's own heart. They should conclude that it occurs when an individual decides that he or she knows better than God, or is fully capable of handling his or her own affairs without divine

help. It is folly to rely on one's own capabilities; the one who does so is actually wandering in darkness and in danger of being deceived.

In response to the second question, your group should conclude that we can avoid being foolish by choosing to seek the Lord and His wisdom. We will read His Word and look to Him for guidance rather than attempting to live according to our own ways.

You may wish to discuss with your class what happens when people trust in themselves and fail to look to God and follow His ways. A quick review of current news headlines will no doubt offer many contemporary examples. Your group should recognize that without God's wisdom, homes are broken, children have no anchor, violence is rampant, and many other dysfunctional situations flourish in society and in individual lives.

7. In Proverbs 31 we find a beautiful tribute to a godly woman. Outer beauty is not mentioned as being important, but inner beauty is highly commended. While godly women of our day will not necessarily perform every activity in this description, they will exemplify the character from which these activities originated. Given that the Book of Proverbs is a challenge to seek and find true wisdom, why do you think a composite picture of virtuous womanhood is included in this final chapter?

There is no right or wrong answer to this question, but it should elicit some valuable class discussion. You may wish to point out that many of these principles of industry and strength of character can apply to men as well.

It might be interesting to generate a list of the virtues mentioned in this description. Such a list would include: trustworthy, a helpmate and asset to the spouse, industrious, benevolent, a maker of beautiful things, a tasteful dresser, strong, honorable, wise, kind, praiseworthy, someone who takes care of the household, honors and respects her spouse in actions and words, and fears the Lord.

Much has been said throughout the Book of Proverbs about the contentious woman. In addition, there have been repeated condemnations of the adulterous and sinful woman. It is appropriate that in this closing chapter, a description is given of commendable womanhood. Without doubt, an individual who has these qualities will be wise and successful in the things that matter, not only in this life, but in the life to come.

### CONCLUSION

A person who heeds the wisdom offered in the Book of Proverbs will have a successful and fulfilling life.

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## The Book of Ecclesiastes

presence was to be recognized and reckoned with at every turn during the brief days of man's sojourn under the sun. The heart of Solomon's advice is found

SOURCE FOR OUTSTIONS	OPENER
SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS Ecclesiastes 1:1 through 12:14	OPENER
· ·	
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." (Ecclesiastes 12:13)	
BACKGROUND	
The Book of Ecclesiastes is a series of instructions	
and eye-witness observations given by "the Preacher,"	
to the young men of Israel. Although the author	
never identified himself by name, Jewish tradition	
records that Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes during the	
last years of his life, probably sometime between	
955 and 931 B.C. The views expressed are obviously	
from an individual who has spent years accumulating	
experiences and perspectives.	
Solomon enjoyed periods of unsurpassed wisdom	
and immense wealth during his lifetime, and was	
able to gratify every personal whim and desire.	
However, in spite of his unlimited advantages,	
Solomon's message could be summed up by the	
Hebrew word <i>hebel</i> , translated in various Biblical	
passages as vanity, futility, meaninglessness, mystery,	
or <i>enigma</i> . Experience had taught him that wisdom, wealth, achievement, and pleasure were not sufficient	
foundations upon which to build one's life. The	
summary statements "All is vanity" and "This also	
is vanity" are repeated over and over, and a tone of	
disappointment and futility is apparent in all twelve	
chapters.	
Solomon's primary purpose in writing the book	
seems to have been to share his observations and	
ultimate conclusion with those who still had life	
before them. While Solomon encouraged the young	
to enjoy material advantages, he pointed them to the	
importance of committing their lives to their Creator	
during their youth, concluding that doing so was the	
only path to meaningful fulfillment in life.	
Though Ecclesiastes was written thousands of	
years ago, it presents a question that individuals of	
each generation must face: what is the meaning of	
life? Solomon did not suggest that life has no purpose	
and is ultimately without profit. Rather, while he	
observed the futility of man's attempts to fill the	
emptiness of life without God, he asserted that God's	

in the conclusion of the book: "Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).	
SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS	NOTES
1. Solomon had wealth and power, accomplishment and honor, fame and pleasure, and was deemed the wisest man in all the world (see 1 Kings 4:29-34). Yet, in Ecclesiastes 1:2-3, he stated that all is vanity. Today, mankind still strives for attainments in terms of wealth, success, and pleasure. Why do you think people fail to find satisfaction even when they achieve these goals?  Class discussion should bring out that man has a spiritual need at the core of his being, and a spiritual need can never be satisfied with material gain or achievements. While there is nothing inherently wrong with prosperity, success, or pleasure, your students should conclude that anything in life which replaces God will never satisfy. Only God can fill the deep longings of the heart. In verses 14 and 17 of chapter 1, Solomon described the results of focusing on earthly experiences and knowledge as being "vexation of spirit." Some translations refer to this as "chasing the wind," a descriptive phrase which aptly captures the futility of such pursuits.  It is interesting to note that in contemporary	
society, those with highly-trained occupations commit suicide at a much higher rate than is the norm, according to statistics offered by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.¹ For example, physicians have a suicide rate nearly 100% above average. Engineers, financiers, and lawyers also have a very high suicide rate. Along with the increase in knowledge and wealth comes pressure and responsibility that seemingly can be overwhelming.  You may wish to follow up by contrasting an individual who strives for material goals with one who strives for spiritual goals. Spiritual striving may not bring material wealth, power, or acclaim in this world. However, the person who puts God first will have His blessing, as well as the satisfaction of knowing that he is pleasing God. Ecclesiastes 2:26 tells us that God supplies joy along with His blessings. Matthew 6:33 and Proverbs 10:22 also support this point. And in addition to satisfaction in this life, the one who makes spiritual goals his priority will enjoy eternity with God in the life to come.	

**2.** In Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, Solomon addressed the subject of time, opening this portion of text with the statement, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." The word translated *season* in this verse means "appointed time." God has an appointed time and order for the events of our lives. While we participate in the specific activities listed, our life experiences are

known and allowed by Him. What are the benefits of accepting and appreciating God's perfect timing? What is the danger in failing to do so?

Your students should conclude that accepting God's timing of the events of our lives is the way to find peace. Romans 8:28 is a good supporting reference. No matter how events or their timing appear on the surface, we can be confident that God is working circumstances together for eternal good.

In response to the second question, your group should conclude that if we fail to accept God's perfect timing, we could find ourselves becoming resentful or doubtful regarding God's care for us. If we struggle and contest and question the will of God, we forfeit the assurance that comes through trust and submission to Him. That mindset could in turn lead to despair or rebellion, or a temptation to take matters into our own hands. Encourage your students to share personal experiences of times when God's perfect timing was revealed in their lives.

As you explore the topic of times and seasons in life, you may wish to bring out that we are responsible for what we do with our time. Our physical bodies have a variety of needs, such as proper nutrition and rest, which must be met in order for our bodies to function properly. We also have emotional needs—verse 4 mentions a time to weep and to laugh. The implication of these verses is that there are normal and permissible activities which should be part of our existence on this earth; however, we must take care not to get so wrapped up in our own needs and activities that we neglect opportunities to serve God and minister to others.

**3.** In Ecclesiastes 4:8, Solomon contemplated the perils of isolation, and stated in verse 9 that "two are better than one." In verses 9 through 12, what does Solomon say are the benefits of companionship? How might these benefits be experienced within the family of God?

Solomon states that if we stand alone, we do not have someone to help us up when we fall. Human companionship offers help (verse 10), warmth (verse 11), and strength or defense (verse 12). As your students discuss the second question, they may suggest that in the family of God, we can support one another in prayer, encourage those who falter, warm hearts by ministering to one another through loving words and deeds, defend one another against the wiles of the enemy, and experience numerous other benefits of Christian fellowship.

Direct your students' attention to the visual image Solomon presented at the end of verse 12—that of a threefold cord. The intertwined strands illustrate that individuals are better when joined and working together. Each person has unique characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses. If they are united, their

union forms something stronger than the individual strands, because each gives strength to the other. If the cord is untwisted, the separate threads are much more easily broken.

While Solomon did not indicate that one of the "strands" of the cord represented God, we know that when two believers are closely joined in the bonds of love and fellowship, Christ is present with them; that union then could be likened to a threefold cord. Matthew 18:19 offers New Testament support for this principle.

**4.** Vows were a common part of Israel's religious practice during the time of Solomon. In Ecclesiastes 5, Solomon addressed making vows or promises to God. What specific warnings did he give regarding this practice? Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

Solomon cautioned against being rash or hasty in speech, which included the making of vows (verse 2). He also pointed to the importance of keeping vows that are made (verse 4), and warned against backing out of a vow by claiming it was a mistake (verse 6). His three-part emphasis made it abundantly clear that any person who made a vow to God would be held accountable before Him to keep it.

These verses offer a good opportunity to explain the difference between a vow and a consecration. Your students should understand that a vow is an irrevocable covenant with God; a consecration is a willing act of dedication or commitment. While vows were a part of religious tradition in Israel, the New Testament mentions vows only twice, both times being made by Christians who vowed to dedicate themselves to God for a length of time, much like the Nazarite vow (Acts 18:18; 21:23; see also Numbers 6:18). We generally do not recommend vows be made because consecrations can accomplish the desired goal.

At times, sincere individuals have innocently made foolish vows. In such a case, the individual should ask God for forgiveness and absolution from the vow, and then thank Him for teaching a valuable lesson about the serious nature of making such a covenant with God. An example of a foolish vow might be one that pledges an action that could be detrimental to the physical body, which is the temple of God. That is clearly forbidden by Scripture (see 1 Corinthians 6:19), so such a vow is not appropriate.

Perhaps the best example of a vow made in this New Testament dispensation is the marriage vow, which provides a good illustration of the lifelong and unbreakable nature of a vow. Since God himself is the Author of the institution of marriage, when a man and woman make a marriage commitment, they are actually taking a vow that is recognized by God as an irrevocable bond (providing that they are both free to marry in accordance with the principles of God's Word). This is true whether or not God is

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acknowledged in the actual wording of the ceremony. While individuals may take steps to legally dissolve a marriage union that is lawful in accordance with Scripture, in the eyes of God only death can end that sacred covenant because the vow was made before God. Point out that there is never any Scriptural allowance made for remarriage, no matter what the laws of the land may permit.

**5.** At times in life it will seem that evil prevails, and the wicked get away with unrestrained wrongdoing. Solomon reflected on this in his day as well. However, in Ecclesiastes 8, he asserted his faith in the ultimate justice of God. How would you summarize the principle Solomon stated in verses 11-13 of this chapter?

These verses zero in on the future states of the righteous versus the wicked. The principle Solomon declared is that though punishment for the wicked seems to be withheld, they ultimately will suffer the consequences of sin, while those who fear God will be rewarded. The prosperity of the wicked on this earth is only a prelude to their eventual destruction, but the righteous will enjoy glory forever with the Lord. Class discussion should bring out that although God's Word is full of promises for His people here and now, it is not this life which is really important. It is where we spend eternity that counts. Our end will be blessed more than we can imagine if we stay true to God.

You could follow up by asking your class how this understanding will help us handle persecution, injustice, or the effects of wickedness when it impacts our personal lives. They should conclude that when we believe that both our temporal trials and our eternal destiny are held in the loving hands of our Heavenly Father and we look to Him for ultimate justice, we will find grace to endure and triumph even in challenging circumstances.

**6.** After considering the uncertainties of the future and the certainty of death, in Ecclesiastes 9:7-9 Solomon observed that there are good things in life, and recommended that his hearers make the most of what they can understand and enjoy. He followed that with the directive found in verse 10. What was his instruction, and how might it apply to our Christian walk?

Solomon's instruction was to do your work while you can, to the best of your ability. The word hand in this verse suggests "talents and abilities." The word find refers to "opportunity," and might alludes to "effort and intensity." Those meanings also pertain when we apply this instruction to our Christian walk. We only have our allotted span of time here on earth to use our abilities and talents in making a spiritual contribution toward the spread of the Gospel. We want to take advantage of every opportunity, and do the work of the Lord with fervency and intensity,

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because when death comes, our time in which we can impact others for eternity will end. This principle is reflected in the words of the old Gospel hymn by Annie Coghill, "Work, for the night is coming...when man's work is o'er."

You may want to expand this thought by pointing out to your group that we must not attempt to do the work of the Lord in our own strength. History tells us that Charles Spurgeon, known as the "Prince of Preachers," often worked eighteen hours a day. One time the famous explorer and missionary David Livingstone asked him, "How do you manage to do two men's work in a single day?" Spurgeon replied, "You have forgotten that there are two of us." When we have the Holy Spirit working in us and through us, more can be accomplished in our work for the Lord than we could ever accomplish with the most intense efforts on our own.

7. Chapter 10 of Ecclesiastes begins a series of proverbs in which Solomon sought to provide some of the wisdom he wanted people to hear. There is no one theme in this compilation of practical advice, which continues through the concluding chapters. Solomon spoke of fools and folly, relationships with rulers, care in conduct, sharpness and strength, wisdom with words, indolence and industry, money and might. What lesson can we learn from the proverb given in Ecclesiastes 10:10?

Solomon stated that if an ax is dull, one must use more strength to gain results. However, if one employs wisdom, he has an advantage in achieving success. Trying to accomplish a task without honing the necessary skills is like chopping down a tree with a dull ax. The wise thing to do in such a case would be to sharpen the ax in order to work more efficiently and achieve more precise results. Productivity will increase if skills are improved through education, training, or practice.

While this proverb certainly applies to many areas of life, you will want to develop the spiritual parallel with your class. In our service for God, we should evaluate whether our "ax" is sharp. Are there steps we could take to make our efforts more effective? Perhaps there is a spiritual experience that needs to be received. Maybe additional training or concerted practice will improve our talent. Each of us wants to be the best we can be for the Lord, and one way we can do this is to open our hearts to the Spirit and allow Him to instruct us as to how we can improve. You may wish to refer to 2 Timothy 2:15 as a New Testament support for this principle.

**8.** Solomon had set out to try all that life had to offer, and the book's final verses offer a summation of his thoughts. At the close of his attempt to point the young to effective and successful paths in life, what did Solomon conclude was the duty of man? Ecclesiastes 12:13

Solomon's summary comment was, "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). All that Solomon had said in his discourse to the young men of Israel reaches a culmination in this verse—a principle he seemingly regarded as the key to a fulfilling life.

It is noteworthy that while Solomon instructed his hearers six times in his book to enjoy life while here on earth, at no time did he advise them to enjoy sin. We must not build our lives on acquiring wisdom, material possessions, or fame, nor expect to find satisfaction in the fulfillment of secular desires. Rather, while we should enjoy the simple pleasures that life affords, we must keep in mind that the all-important purpose in life is our relationship with our Creator.

Those who have a relationship with God and

### CONCLUSION

are living in obedience to Him have the promise of someday finding complete fulfillment and life eternal.	

<sup>1.</sup> http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/surveillance/NOMS/icd-occ-form.html



## The Song of Solomon

Solomon offers a beautifully descriptive celebration

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
Song of Solomon 1:1 through 8:14	
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"He brought me to the banqueting house, and his	
banner over me was love." (Song of Solomon 2:4)	
BACKGROUND	
The Song of Solomon is a poetic work with	
romantic love as its theme. Perhaps the most	
enigmatic book in the Bible, it contains no direct	
reference to God or religion. However, since we	
know that all Scripture is given by the inspiration of	
God and is profitable for us (see 2 Timothy 3:16), this	
book's inclusion in the Word of God is no accident.	
Commentators offer a wide variety of inter-	
pretations of the Song of Solomon. It has been viewed as an allegory, a typification of the love of	
Christ for the Church, a collection of Hebrew love	-
lyrics, and a factual narrative. (See the Song of	
Solomon Overview for a more detailed description of	
the various interpretations.)	
Along with many holiness scholars, we have	
chosen to regard the book as a factual narrative.	
Adam Clarke suggests that the plot concerns	
Solomon and his bride, who was the daughter of	
Pharoah; this interpretation provides a framework	
for the passages which present intimate details of	
the physical relationship between a husband and his	
wife. Another prominent holiness commentary views the narrative as a description of Solomon's love for	
a Shulamite maiden who had already given her heart	
to a young shepherd. In this approach, the intimate	
passages are part of the Shulamite's dreams of her	
beloved. This approach is the one used in the outline	
presented in <i>Daybreak</i> and <i>Discovery</i> . However, in	
view of the wide range of explanations of this book,	
we do not take a fixed position as to its interpretation.	
Understanding the book is made even more	
complex due to the absence of indicators within	-
the text as to who is speaking. Depending upon	
whom the passage is ascribed to, the interpretation	
of many passages can be quite diverse. In addition, the extravagant language and imagery within the	
Song of Solomon comes from another culture and	
era, and agricultural and botanical comparisons are	
frequent. Overall, ancient Eastern phraseology can be	
challenging for contemporary minds to grasp.	
Difficulties notwithstanding, the Song of	

of love, marriage, and the physical relationship between a man and a woman. In our society, human sexuality frequently is exploited in books, movies, and advertising. Sexual relationships are regarded as temporary and are often based on personal gratification. By contrast, the relationship portrayed in the Song of Solomon is one of fidelity, self-giving, and bonding. There is much to be learned and understood in a study of this book.

## SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS

**1.** There are many comparisons in the Song of Solomon which describe love, including those in chapter 1. To begin our overview of this book, how would you summarize the nature of love within the context of God's plan for marriage?

Class discussion of this question should bring out that the love between a husband and wife is to be a deep, committed bond and lasting intimacy that is compared in God's Word to the relationship between Christ and His Church. We can enjoy and appreciate love because God created it as a gift for us. Your students' comments will establish the basis for your study of this book with its portrayal of intimate love.

As an interesting follow-up, you might ask your group to mentally compose a metaphor or descriptive comparison of what love is like. You may have one or two in your group who are willing to share with the class what they came up with, but unless you have an exceptionally creative group, they will find it is not easy to frame word pictures that adequately portray the nature of love. Attempting to do so may give them a new appreciation for the lyrical descriptions found in these eight chapters!

**2.** In verse 3 of chapter 1, the Shulamite refers to her beloved, saying, "Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth." Like many statements in the Song of Solomon, her words could be interpreted in a number of ways. What message or attitude of heart do you think she might have been conveying?

Your class should conclude that the very name of the Shulamite's beloved was precious to her, and sweeter than the most costly of perfumes. Point out to your class that ointments and perfumes, which were compounds of expensive and fragrant ingredients, were very significant in Solomon's culture; they frequently had a role in entertainment and symbolic rituals such as the anointing of kings and priests. The woman may have been intimating that the sweet and costly perfume represented the precious qualities that were so attractive in her beloved's character.

You could expand this thought by bringing out that names carry impressions. What comes to mind when you hear the name of the president, a heroic individual in history, or a sports or entertainment star

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in our day? Often, our initial thought or impression is an indication of the actions and character of the person named. One conclusion that can be drawn from the Shulamite's statement is that her beloved was known for his exceptional character. Ask your group what role character and integrity play in a successful love/marriage relationship.

**3.** Many of the passages in Song of Solomon employ images and descriptions that were extravagantly complimentary. What are some of the word pictures given in Song of Solomon 1:9-17; 2:1-3? What part do words of praise and appreciation play in building a successful relationship?

*Images employed in these verses include:* 

- A company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots (chapter 1, verse 9)
- A bundle of myrrh (verse 13)
- A cluster of camphire (a flowering plant, probably henna) in the vineyards (verse 14)
- Dove's eyes (verse 15)
- The rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys (chapter 2, verse 1)
- A lily among thorns (verse 2)
- An apple tree among the trees of the wood (verse 3)

While the specific comparisons in these verses might not be considered complimentary in our day, the point is that praise and appreciation are valuable tools in building a successful relationship. This is especially true in a marriage. When we offer compliments and words of appreciation to our spouse, his/her self-confidence is increased and the bond between us is strengthened.

It is important for compliments to be sincere and honest. When they are not, they are simply flattery, which is untrue or insincere praise. Flattery is usually viewed negatively and is often perceived as being manipulative. Our words of appreciation and praise should be motivated by a desire to please our spouse, rather than to gain something for ourselves.

**4.** While many of the verbal exchanges in the Song of Solomon allude to physical intimacy, a contrasting message occurs in Song of Solomon 3:5. What behavior does this passage enjoin?

This verse points to the necessity of physical restraint. It is interesting to note that the injunction not to arouse or awaken love occurs four times within this short book. While the love between man and wife should be unrestrained and unashamed, love must only be aroused at the time and under the circumstances prescribed by God. Restraint is to be exercised by those outside of the bonds of marriage.

Depending upon the age and marital status of those in your class, this may be a good opportunity

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to point out that God intends that His children walk in sexual purity and victory. As holy people who have dedicated ourselves completely to God, we must follow the directives of Scripture. For married individuals, that means to be faithful to our spouses. For unmarried individuals, that means to avoid situations that might lead to a compromise of our integrity and physical purity, and to ask the Spirit of God to help us establish appropriate boundaries and guidelines for behavior in our relationships.

**5.** In Song of Solomon 4:12, Solomon referred to the Shulamite maiden as "a garden enclosed," and "a spring shut up, a fountain sealed." Bible scholars agree that this passage was an affirmation of the maiden's purity. While virginity is considered out-of-date in today's culture, it has always been God's plan for those who are unmarried. What impact can moral integrity have when it comes to our Christian testimony?

A blameless, holy life will shine as a light in this dark world. Our associates can tell our moral principles by the way we live. Holding to Scripturally ordained moral boundaries could make or break the credibility of our testimonies. A moral failure could cause our Christian witness to be of no account or even a reproach.

**6.** In response to the question posed in Song of Solomon 5:9, "What is thy beloved more than another beloved?" the Shulamite described the man she loved. She ended that description by saying, "This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem" (Song of Solomon 5:16). Why is friendship such an important element in a courtship and then in a healthy marriage?

Open your class discussion of this question by asking your group to describe the qualities that make a good friendship. They should conclude that friendship involves respect, shared commitment, mutual trust, effective communication, support of one another, caring consideration, faithfulness, and a whole range of other attributes.

Ultimately, these behaviors will provide a solid foundation for a good marriage if and when the relationship grows and blossoms into love. Romantic ardor and feelings of love are wonderful and necessary in a healthy marriage, but it is important that the two individuals are also best friends. The intense emotions of romantic love may fade somewhat once the ongoing realities and challenges of everyday life set in. Differences between husband and wife will occur in every marriage. There are adjustments to make, and situations that come our way to try us. However, a marriage that is built on and supported by a strong friendship between the two individuals will have a much greater chance of success.

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**7.** In chapter 5, the Shulamite maiden stated, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." How does this statement, which emphasizes belonging to one another, contrast with the "put yourself first" mindset so prevalent in our day?

Class discussion should bring out that in the "put yourself first" mindset of present-day society, emphasis is placed on individual rights, needs, opinions, and preferences. Self is all-important. However, the Bible teaches that if we truly belong to our spouse, our independent rights, needs, and privileges are secondary to the concerns of our marriage.

You may wish to emphasize the concept of belonging to one another by referring to Ephesians 5:32, which speaks of a man being "joined" unto his wife. The original Greek word translated joined means "to be glued to" or "to adhere to." When we are "joined" with our spouse in marriage, we become one flesh. This is to be a life-long bond. The prevailing attitude of our day is that self comes first, and there is no need to stay married if the union no longer satisfies or fulfills the individual. However, this is in direct contrast to Scriptural principles. Jesus himself decreed, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6).

**8.** What characteristics of love did the Shulamite maiden describe in Song of Solomon 8:6-7?

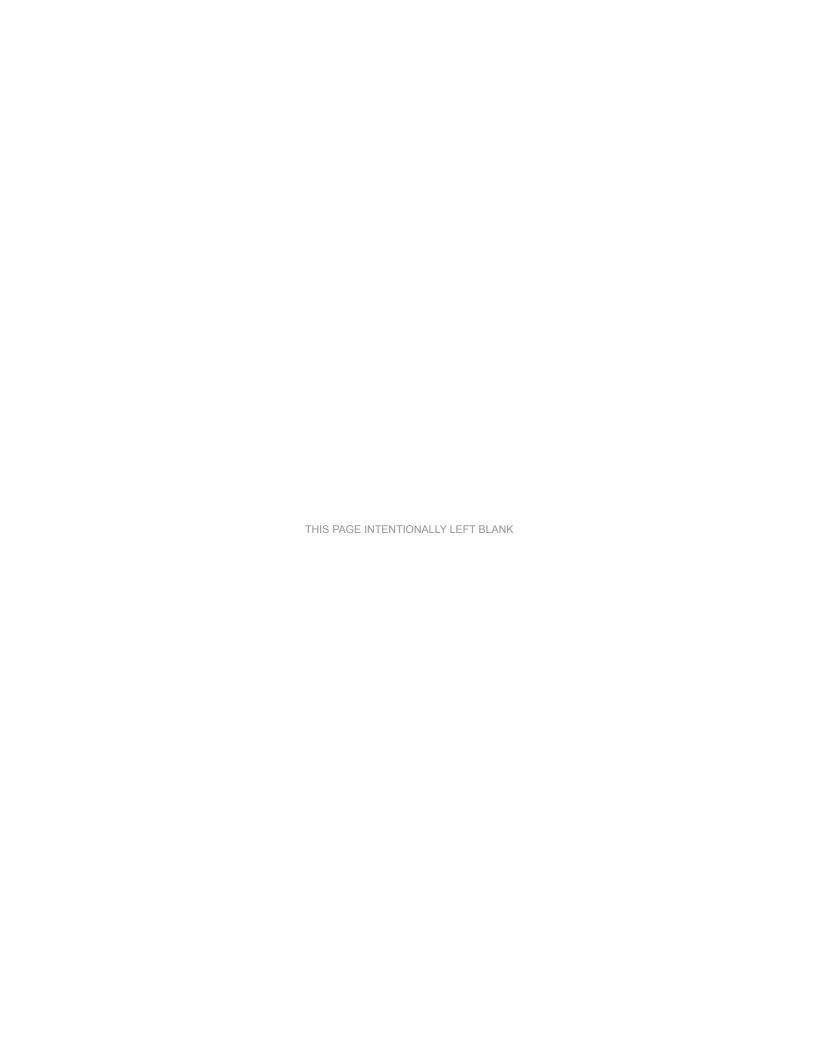
She stated that love is as strong as death, it cannot be destroyed by disaster, and it is beyond price—even a king with all his riches could not buy it, because it can only be received as a gift. This question leads directly into a discussion of the following question.

**9.** Many commentators compare the love relationship described in the Song of Solomon to the much deeper love relationship that exists between Christ and His Bride. Throughout the Song of Solomon, we see verses that refer to the fact that those in love desire to be together. What do these passages teach us about the appropriate attitude of the Bride toward Christ the Bridegroom's ultimate return?

Two people who are in love and awaiting their wedding day desire to be together. Being apart is not easy, and the thought of seeing each other causes great anticipation. As Christians, we desire the presence of Christ with us every day, looking for and anticipating His presence when we come to Him in prayer. However, when we love the Bridegroom as we should, we can think of nothing we desire more than His return to this earth to claim His own. Then we will see Him face to face, and be united with Him throughout eternity!

## CONCLUSION

The Song of Solomon is a beautiful picture of love, and it can teach us much about the fulfillment and joy that marriage can bring.



Psalm 34 prophesies that the Messiah's bones would not be broken, and Psalm 40 relates that He came to do His Father's will. (While Psalm 23, "The Shepherd

# 444

## **Book I of The Psalms**

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
Psalms 1:1 through 41:13	-
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart	
trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart	
greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him." (Psalm 28:7)	
BACKGROUND	
The Book of Psalms contains 150 chapters which	
are divided into five sections, or books. This lesson	
focuses on Book I, which encompasses Psalms 1-41.	
All the psalms in this section are attributed to David	
except three: Psalms 1, 10, and 33.	
Book I was probably the first official psalter of Israel (the compendium of the nation's lyrical songs,	
hymns, and prayers). The other sections, added later,	
were written over about one thousand years between	
the time of Moses (approximately 1520 B.C.) until	
after the return of the Southern Kingdom from	
Babylonian captivity (approximately 445 B.C.). In	
the records of David's era found in the Chronicles,	
there is frequent mention of sacred music and song	
being part of Israel's worship. (For example, see 2 Chronicles 7:6 and 35:15.) Bible scholars agree that	
most of the psalms likely were sung for some period	
of time before they were added into the psalter.	
Most of the psalms in Book I are personal in	
nature. They are presented in no particular order.	
While some relate to specific events in the life of	
David, even those are not arranged in a chronological	
progression.  Psalm 1 offers a prelude to the whole collection in	
Book I. It may have been composed for that purpose,	
but whether or not that is the case, the first psalm does	
provide a foundation for all the psalms that follow.	
God's provision of a Savior for His people is	
a recurring theme throughout the Book of Psalms,	
and many instances are found in this section. Psalm	
2 portrays the Messiah's triumph and kingdom; this	
psalm is quoted or alluded to in the New Testament at least eighteen times—more than any other in this	
section. Psalm 16:8-11 foreshadows Christ's death	
and resurrection. Psalm 22 alludes to the suffering	
Savior on the Cross and presents detailed prophecies	
of the crucifixion, all of which were fulfilled perfectly.	

Psalm," is a part of Book I, it will be studied as a separate lesson.) Jewish tradition correlates the five sections of the Book of Psalms with the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible, which were authored by Moses), so Book I is called the "Genesis" section. The divine name mainly used within this section is "Jehovah" (LORD). SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS NOTES **1.** Although Psalm 1 may or may not have been specifically written as an introduction to the whole collection of psalms, it sets the tone for them. What is the primary contrast developed in this psalm? This psalm contrasts the life of a righteous individual with the life of one who is unrighteous. Once your class has reached that conclusion, expand the discussion by focusing on the attributes of a righteous person, based on the specifics given in verses 1-3. Point out to your class that the first word, blessed, could be translated "How happy!" Certainly the person who has the characteristics mentioned in these verses will be happy. As you consider verse 1, you may wish to lead your group in a scrutiny of the verbs "walk," "stand," and "sit." Bring out that the phrase "walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly" infers that the faithful man does not ask for nor follow ungodly advice, as it will lead him away from holiness and fellowship with God. "Standeth in the way of sinners" suggests abiding in close proximity to the values and actions of unbelievers. "Sitteth in the seat of the scornful" means to become settled and comfortable in the attitude of disbelief or scoffing regarding God and Biblical principles. *In contrast to the righteous, verse 4 brings* out that ungodly individuals are like chaff—a worthless substance so light that it is carried away by the slightest breath of wind. This symbolizes the unrighteous life that drifts without any real spiritual direction. **2.** Several psalms in Book I begin with the author conveying distress and helplessness, and yet end on a positive note of confident joy and victory. Sometimes this change takes place between one verse and the next! For example, the transition occurs at verse 8 in Psalm 6, at verse 5 in Psalm 13, and at verse 6 in Psalm 28. Why do you think the psalmist's perspective shifted in these examples?

Class discussion should bring out that when the psalmist turned away from his problem and focused instead on God's ability to deal with it, he regained his spirit of confident joy and victory. This principle is certainly applicable in our day as well. The challenges we face may seem overwhelming. However, when we look away from our challenges and fix our attention on God, who is all-powerful and well able to solve our problems and sustain us, He provides renewed courage and strength.

Notice that in each of these psalms, the turning point came when the psalmist verbalized his trust in God. At times we may need to firmly state (perhaps to God, or perhaps to another individual) that we are placing our trust in God as an act of will, rehearsing the times that He has met our needs and resolved serious situations for us in the past. When we step out in faith, He quickly will uplift our spirits and provide an assurance of His love, awareness, and power. You may wish to ask your students to share times when they personally experienced a change of perspective like those described in these psalms.

**3.** Psalm 7 is a song of lament written by David regarding those who had falsely accused him. While the identity of Cush the Benjamite (named in the title) cannot be assuredly stated, he probably was a cohort of Saul who made slanderous accusations against David. How did the psalmist respond to these falsehoods? What can we learn from how he handled the situation?

Rather than taking matters into his own hands, the psalmist responded to the falsehoods by asking God for deliverance and justice. He trusted that the Lord would vindicate him because he was innocent of the accusations made by Cush. His plea in verses 3-5 in essence was asking God to judge him first if there was any truth to the accusation.

Class discussion of the second question should bring out that it is always best to let God defend us. He can deal with the situation—no matter what it involves—far better than we can. He will vindicate us if and when He knows that is best. No matter what the outcome, when we do not retaliate toward the one making false accusations, it proves our trust is in God, and this can be a wonderful validation of our Christian testimony. In addition, challenges such as this provide us with an opportunity to grow spiritually.

It is noteworthy that at the conclusion of the psalm, David praised God. He did not express gratitude because those who had done evil against him were to be punished, but because God's glory and righteousness were being magnified. That should be our ultimate goal as well when we face interpersonal challenges.

**4.** In Psalm 19:7-9, six different words or short phrases are used to refer to the whole body of Scriptural truth. These six words are followed by six descriptors (adjectives). What are the six words and their corresponding adjectives?

It may be beneficial to address this question by making a chart. Your students will provide the words or phrases for the first and second columns, and

the third column can be added as a part of the class discussion.

Word	Description/ Adjective	What it does
Law	Perfect (without	Converts
Luw	blemish)	the soul
Testimony	Sure	Makes wise
of the Lord	(consistent)	the simple
Statutes	Right	Brings joy
Commandments	Pure (no	Brings
Communaments	ulterior motive)	enlightenment
Fear of the Lord	Clean	Endures forever
Judgments	True and	Duings nowand
of the Lord	righteous	Brings reward

As you conclude your discussion of this question, point out to your group that the benefits of the law will only be activated in our lives if we heed and obey it. When we do obey, we will find that God's words are more precious than anything else. Though the unrighteous in the world around us may appear to prosper, aligning our lives to the commandments of God's Word will bring eternal benefit.

**5.** Psalm 22, which is sometimes referred to as "The Crucifixion Psalm," is an example of a Messianic psalm. In it, David prophetically described the Messiah's death on the Cross. When Jesus was on the Cross, He spoke the words of verse 1 (see Mark 15:34). What are some other verses in this psalm that refer to Christ the Sin-bearer as He suffered upon the Cross?

Your group will likely identify the following verses as these are direct references. However, other verses, depending upon interpretation, may also allude to the sufferings of Christ.

Verse 1. Since Jesus was bearing the sin of mankind, He felt isolated and separated from the Father.

Verse 6. Jesus certainly was despised of the people; they desired to have a murderer released instead of the Lord, and demanded that Jesus be crucified.

Verse 7. The gestures of contempt (they "shoot out the lip" and "shake the head") are described in Matthew 27:39 and Mark 15:29.

Verse 14. "All my bones are out of joint." The weight of the human body in the process of crucifixion causes the bones to be pulled out of joint.

Verse 15. "My tongue cleaveth to my jaws." Jesus cried out, "I thirst" (John 19:28).

Verse 16. "They pierced my hands and my feet." Jesus' hands and feet were nailed to the Cross.

Verse 18. "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture." This scene at the crucifixion is recorded in all of the Gospels.

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Point out that this psalm is a beautiful example of the divine inspiration of Scripture. David wrote this psalm many hundreds of years before Christ came to earth, and yet the details he described were all precisely fulfilled when Jesus gave His life on Calvary.

**6.** In Psalm 26:2, David asked the Lord to examine him, and to try (examine or investigate) his "reins" (innermost parts; affections, motives, thoughts) and his heart. Why should we follow the psalmist's example and ask God to search our hearts?

If we want to go deeper in our walks with God, we must be willing to open the innermost parts of our being to God. As your group discusses the question, they may point out that inviting God's scrutiny makes us more aware of our own thoughts, motives, and actions. Through the Holy Spirit, we may identify aspects of our lives we should modify, or steps we should take to more closely align our lives with the holiness of God. When we take action along a line the Lord shows us, our relationship with Him will be enriched and deepened.

You may wish to point out that David's opening petition, "Judge me, O Lord; for I have walked in mine integrity," has the tone of a formal oath of innocence. David was eager for the Lord's evaluation because he felt that he had been walking in integrity. This was not a prideful assertion, because he credited God for his rectitude—he said that it was because he had trusted in the Lord that he would not "slide" (waver). Knowing that we are living as God wants us to is a source of sanctified joy. In the New Testament, Acts 24:16 substantiates the same principle.

**7.** Psalm 38 bears the superscription "A Psalm of David, to bring to remembrance," and is classified as a penitential psalm. According to verses 3-4, what was the cause of David's obvious physical, emotional, and spiritual sufferings? In his desperate state, what does verse 18 tell us he resolved to do?

David's sufferings were the result of sin. The sin is not named, but most likely was the killing of Uriah, Bathsheba's husband (see 2 Samuel 11). Psalms 6, 32, and 51 also are traditionally associated with that event. Of all the penitential psalms, perhaps this one expresses David's anguished state most graphically. His vivid descriptions reveal a man who was sick in soul and body, forsaken by his friends, beset by his enemies, and overwhelmed by a sense of guilt. David's assertion that "thine arrows stick fast in me" was an allusion to God's chastisement. The images of no "soundness" in his flesh, wounds that "stink" and "are corrupt," and loins that are filled with a "loathsome disease" all express in vivid metaphorical language the corruption of sin.

As a follow-up to the second question, direct your students to verse 18, in which David stated, "I will


declare [confess] mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin." Remind your class that it is certainly not necessary for a believer to go back into sin. However, if that happens, there is a way to return to God—heartfelt repentance—and David chose that path. He presented his condition fully to God, holding nothing back. The psalm concludes with three final petitions: David pleaded with God not to forsake him, not to be far from him, and to quickly help him. The point should be made that God always responds to sincere repentance. He does not withhold or delay forgiveness, making one who is truly repentant continue to suffer for sin. However, while God delivers from the eternal consequences of sin, earthly consequences may still remain. That was the case with David in his sin regarding Bathsheba and Uriah.

**8.** The timeless principles recorded in the Psalms are why people in every era have turned to this book for comfort and encouragement. Careful reading reminds us how near the Lord really is, and how quickly He meets us when we reach out to Him. What verse in Book I particularly spoke to you, and why?

This question should provide a good way to wrap up your lesson. Point out to your class that as we read the Psalms, we get glimpses of what the authors were going through. We empathize with their pain and often can identify with the burdens and concerns they carried, because through the ages of time, individuals have faced the same types of troubles.

While the problems may be universal, the verses God gives to us are extremely personal. There is something very special about the verses the Lord writes upon our hearts in times of trial. As we lay claim to them, they become "our" promises. This is a vital way He ministers to us. As your students share verses that have come alive to them, it will be an encouragement to your whole class.

#### CONCLUSION

The Psalms are beautiful because they are so personal. Every man, woman, and child can relate to them in some degree, and find comfort in them. While the Psalms are the experiences of humanity expressed in writing, we also see in them how man is affected by a holy God.


# Teacher's Guide



# The Shepherd's Psalm

about the shepherd care of God. However, it is still traditionally sung by Jews in Hebrew at

their Sabbath meal on Saturday afternoon.

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
Psalm 23:1-6	
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."	
(Psalm 23:1)	
BACKGROUND	
Psalm 23, frequently referred to as "The Shepherd Psalm," is one of the most well-known passages in all of Scripture. Bible scholars and believers through the ages have acclaimed its inspiration, literary beauty, and depth of spiritual insight, viewing it as unexcelled in religious literature. Authored by David, this psalm evidences both the psalmist's early vocation as a shepherd and his close personal relationship with God.  There is no indicator of exactly when in David's life the psalm was composed. Christian writer F. B. Meyer wrote, "There is no question as to who wrote it—David's autograph is on every verse. But when	
and where did it first utter itself upon the ear of	
man? Was it sung first amid the hills of Bethlehem, as the sheep were grazing over the wolds, dotting	
them like chalk-stones? Or was it poured first upon	
the ear of the moody king, whose furrowed brow	
made so great a contrast to the fresh and lovely	
face of the shepherd lad, who was 'of a beautiful	
countenance, and goodly to look to?' It may have been. But there is a strength, a maturity, a depth	
which are not wholly compatible with tender youth,	
and seem rather to betoken the touch of the man who	
has learned good by knowing evil, and who, amid	
the many varied experiences of human life, has fully	
tested the shepherd graces of the Lord of whom he	
sings."1	
One outstanding feature of this psalm is the	
skillful use of contrasted imagery. David's words	
describe both pastoral peace and passage through peril, the potential of evil and the prospect of	
good. Through these six verses, the concept of the	
complete supply of every need is developed. The	
psalmist concludes his beautiful meditation with the	
thought that after a lifetime filled with goodness and	
mercy, he will dwell forever in the presence of God.	
Three thousand years have passed since	
the sweet singer of Israel first sang this psalm	

#### SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS 1. The first words of this beautiful psalm are "The LORD is my shepherd." The word translated "LORD" in this passage refers to the self-existent nature of God, the great I AM who is unchangeable and all-powerful. How do you think this understanding of God's nature enabled the psalmist to state the remainder of that verse, "I shall not want" (suffer deprivation), with such profound assurance? David understood that the great, unchanging, all-powerful God was certainly well able to provide for his needs. Direct your group's attention to the word "my" and ask them to explain the significance of that pronoun. Discussion should bring out that David was not speaking of the fact that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would provide for the needs of the nation of Israel, although that was true. He had a personal connection with God which allowed him to state with assurance, "The LORD is my shepherd." Your students should grasp the concept that confidence in God is a personal matter. Knowing of God, or even possessing a vast knowledge of Scripture, will never provide that assurance. It is only when we have a direct and intimate relationship with God himself that we have the assurance that He will provide for our every need. 2. In verse 2, David said that his Shepherd "maketh me to lie down in green pastures" and "leadeth me beside the still waters." Personalize this portion of the psalm, and write a brief description of how the Good Shepherd accomplishes this in your life. Your students' responses will provide a paraphrase of these verses; they should center on the fact that as our Good Shepherd, God provides for our every need. The term green literally means "fresh shoots" and pastures means "habitation." Since areas of fertile vegetation and still waters in semi-arid Palestine were few and far between, sheep had to be led from place to place to find enough grass and water to sustain them. It took ongoing effort on the part of the shepherd to make sure the needs of the flock were met. Follow up by encouraging your students to share accounts from their own knowledge or experience of times when God provided for the physical needs of His children. **3.** The psalmist went on to assert, "He restoreth my soul" (verse 3). One meaning of the word translated restore is "to refresh." We are well acquainted with the need for regular restoration and refreshment of our physical bodies. In this verse, however, David said that his soul was restored—a statement that points to spir-

There may be more than one answer to this question. We know that one way God has provided for this

itual restoration and refreshment. How does God pro-

vide for that need in our lives?

need is by establishing one day in seven as a time for worship, spiritual renewal, and refreshment. We live in a very high-pressured, goal-oriented society, and pausing on the Lord's Day to be renewed and restored in our spirits is a vital necessity.

Restoration and refreshment also come through our times of personal communion with God. Though our physical bodies may be depleted by toil and the cares of life, spiritual strength and energy can be renewed through time spent with the Lord. The prophet Isaiah voiced this truth in Isaiah 40:28-31; a New Testament affirmation of this concept can be found in Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4:16. If time allows for further discussion of this question, you could ask your students to share some of the times that the Lord restored their souls

**4.** In the second part of verse 3, the psalmist stated, "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." Two individuals are mentioned in this verse: "He" and "me." The role of the Shepherd is stated—He leads. What action is required of us, as sheep of the Good Shepherd? What steps can we take to make sure we do our part successfully?

The answer to the first question is simple: we must follow. The tenderest and best of shepherds (which our Shepherd certainly is) cannot bring his flock to a pasture or a place of safety unless the sheep follow him.

In response to the second question, several answers may be offered, but specific steps suggested will all likely point to the concept that we must follow closely. We should avoid any tendency to go our own ways, only looking to the Shepherd when we find ourselves in difficulty or danger. We should be careful not to linger behind by neglecting to quickly obey the commands of our Master. We should keep focused on the One we are following, making sure we are not distracted by the world around us. In the physical realm, predators attack the stragglers who have drifted away from the flock, and that provides a warning to us in the spiritual realm.

Ask your class to define what they think is meant by the "paths of righteousness." Your group should conclude that these paths are established by the Word of God. These are straight paths—holy paths. One of the functions of Scripture is "instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16), so we can be sure that the Shepherd will always lead us in accordance with His written Word.

**5.** Verse 4 is probably one of the most familiar in all of Scripture. Why was the psalmist able to face the prospect of walking through the valley of the shadow of death with such assurance?

The psalmist had assurance because he knew God was with him. As humans, we have a tendency to


contemplate death from an earthly perspective. Many people shrink from the thought of death: they view it with apprehension or even fear. However, the death of a child of God is not an occasion for fear.

Expand your discussion of this verse by looking together at some of the encouraging facts about death that can be found in this passage. For example:

- Death is not an enduring condition, but a passage or transition—the psalmist pictures it as a valley we walk through.
- Though the valley is unknown, David was comforted by the knowledge that God was with him, and that can be our comfort as well.
- The psalmist, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, called it the "shadow of death." Though a shadow may be dark (or unknown), it cannot hurt us, just as the shadow of a sword cannot kill.

If your class is primarily made up of adults, you could conclude discussion of this verse by sharing accounts of Christians who rejoiced at the time of their departure from this life. One favorite account in Apostolic Faith history (retold in an upcoming Daybreak devotional for Psalms 115-116) revolves around John Clasper, a beloved minister known to many as "Brother Scotty." When he was about to pass into eternity, the nurse in attendance asked if she could do anything for him. He said, "Just roll back the roof, and let me go!" Like the psalmist, there was no fear in Brother Scotty's heart as he approached the end of life on earth.

**6.** In David's day, the shepherd's rod and staff referred to in verse 4 served multiple functions. It could be used to defend the sheep from predators, guide the flock by gentle nudges, extricate wandering animals from peril, or correct a wayward sheep. Given those uses, why do you think the psalmist referred to the rod as a source of "comfort"?

Class discussion should bring out that David could regard the shepherd's rod as a comfort because it symbolized the shepherd's devoted care of his flock. The shepherd was not a disinterested bystander; he was actively involved in watching over the sheep.

Consider the watchful care of our Good Shepherd. He is ever mindful that our spiritual foe seeks an opportunity to attack. He guides us to safety by the gentle nudges of His Spirit. He will apply correction when we need it, but that correction will always be done with mercy and lovingkindness. There is great comfort in understanding that our Shepherd's desire is for us to thrive spiritually, He knows the best paths for us to travel in, and every action He takes is done with our highest good in mind. It is wonderful to grasp the fact of how absolutely our God assumes the care of all who trust in Him!

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7. In verse 5, the setting of this psalm transitions from the pasture to the home, and from the Shepherd to the Divine Host who presides at a feast where David is an honored guest. (Anointing a guest with oil was done at banquets in David's day as a mark of hospitality and honor.) This verse contains the psalm's only reference to the enemies who arrayed themselves against David at various times in his life. The psalmist seems to be saying, "I am not only Jehovah's sheep, but also His beloved companion and guest, and that fact is apparent even to my opponents." Based on this word picture, what conclusion can we draw about what our attitude should be toward those who oppose us?

Your students should conclude that when we are in the care of God, there is no reason to fear those who oppose us. While David's enemies were real, no sense of apprehension, confusion, or fear is indicated by this verse. As we "sit at the table" of God's divine providence and enjoy His blessings on our lives, we can depend upon His protection. When facing very real opposition, our very lack of stress or anxiety may testify to those watching that we are sustained by God himself.

If time allows, reference could be made to godly individuals through history who fearlessly faced great opposition for their faith, and yet maintained a settled peace in their spirits. Some examples are Paul the Apostle, Martin Luther, William Tyndale, and Richard Wurmbrand, but there are countless others who could be included on such a list.

**8.** David closed his beautiful psalm by stating that his cup was running over—an expressive metaphor describing God's fullness and blessing—and then declaring that the goodness and mercy of God would follow him "all the days of my life." The word *all* in that phrase is fully encompassing. Consider what you know of events in David's life. What were some of the types of "days" he experienced? What does this teach us about God's presence in our daily lives?

Class discussion of the first question will bring out that David experienced days of triumph, joy, and victory, but he also experienced days that brought defeat, grief, remorse, and pain. Once this has been established, point your class back to the word "all." In every situation, David was confident that the goodness and mercy of God would follow (or pursue) him. The word mercy (hesed in Hebrew) in this verse is translated in other Scriptures as "lovingkindness;" it refers to the covenant love of God. David clearly had complete confidence in God's abiding faithfulness.

In response to the second question, your class should conclude that we can have this same assurance regarding God's presence in the ups and downs of our daily lives. Of course He shares in our days of joy and victory. However, God does not move away from us in times of difficulty. If the "days" in our lives include




# **Book II of The Psalms**

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
Psalms 42:1 through 72:20	
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help	
in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the	
earth be removed, and though the mountains be	
carried into the midst of the sea." (Psalm 46:1-2)	
BACKGROUND	
Psalm 42 begins the second book (or subdivision)	
of the Book of Psalms, a collection of thirty-one	
chapters which ends with Psalm 72. Bible scholars	
think that Book II was compiled primarily during	
the reign of Solomon (970 B.C. to 931 B.C.), and	
possibly was added to the official worship collection during the reign of Hezekiah or Josiah.	
David wrote the vast majority of psalms included	
in Book I, and eighteen in this second section are	
credited to him. One is attributed to Solomon, and	
the remaining psalms in this group are credited to the	
"sons of Korah," who were Temple musicians and	
assistants.	
These psalms were used in the Tabernacle and Temple services. In some cases, portions of the	
titles relate to how they were presented musically.	
For example, the word <i>Shoshannim</i> (a word that	
literally means "lilies"), which appears in the titles of	
Psalms 45, 60, and 69, may have referred to a specific	
melody, to a lily-shaped straight trumpet, or to a	
six-stringed instrument typically used to accompany the song. The word <i>Alamoth</i> , in the superscription	
of Psalm 46, can be translated as "young woman,"	
and probably indicates that the psalm was to be	
sung by a high voice or played upon a high-pitched	
instrument. Psalm 55 is designated as a Maschil (an	
"instructional" song) to be played by the <i>Neginoth</i> or	
"stringed instruments."  With Jewish tradition correlating the five sections	
of the Book of Psalms to the first five books of the	
Bible, this grouping is called the "Exodus" section.	
Just as Exodus describes the bondage and deliverance	
of Israel, many of these psalms describe the nation	-
as ruined and then calling out to God for deliverance.	
Psalm 42 sets the scene by crying out for God's	
presence in a dry wilderness experience; many of the following psalms relate how God is able to rescue	
His people.	
The divine name predominantly used in Book II	
is El or Elohim (God).	

#### SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS **NOTES** 1. Psalm 42 may have been written by David during his flight from Absalom, when he took refuge in Mahanaim (see 2 Samuel 17:24). Whatever the exact setting, the psalmist's circumstances clearly prevented his attendance at public worship, and he had a strong desire to feel the presence of God among those with whom he once had worshipped. In verses 1-2, what metaphor or word picture did David use to describe his longing for God? David compared himself to a hart (or deer) searching for water. ("Water brooks" are subterranean springs.) Point out to your group that David was not indifferent to this forced absence from the house of God. According to verses 3-4, he was moved to tears over the situation, and memories of his former free access reinforced his sadness and longing. Consider with your class: do we fully value our privilege of attending church? If that privilege were taken from us, would we experience the depth of grief expressed by the psalmist? We want to be sure our opportunity to worship never becomes commonplace. It is important that we do not come to the house of God only out of habit or a sense of duty. We want to focus on God with full appreciation of our opportunity to draw near to Him. If time allows, a further thought can be developed based on this passage. Point out that although David appeared to be struggling between two emotions—his faith in the Almighty God and a sense of dejection—he realized that his hope was in God. When he remembered that, his spirit rallied and he affirmed his confidence that God would "command his lovingkindness in the daytime" and that "in the night his song shall be with me." The point should be made that at times we too may experience conflicting emotions. If that occurs, we should follow David's example by focusing on the fact that our hope is in God. 2. While Psalm 45 is a wedding song ("a song of loves") which was composed to celebrate the king's wedding, it is also Messianic in scope as it includes a prophetic allusion to the identity of the King in verses 6-8. Given that, who does the bride represent, and what is the bride instructed to do? Since verses 6-8 allude prophetically to Christ (a in Hebrews 1:8-9 as applicable to Christ), the King's

view supported by the fact that verses 6-7 are quoted in Hebrews 1:8-9 as applicable to Christ), the King's bride represents the Bride of Christ, the Church. Verses 10-11 instruct the bride to "forget...thine own people, and thy father's house"—she was to make a break with her former identity, sever her old ties, and worship her Bridegroom.

Ask your class to parallel the instruction given to the bride in this psalm to what we must do when we give our lives to Christ and become His Bride. They should conclude that we are to separate ourselves from our past, turn away from the "culture" of sin and become wholly dedicated to Christ, and to worship Him. Verses 13-17 portray the rich blessings that will be bestowed upon the Bride as she is united forever with her Heavenly Bridegroom.

If time allows, encourage your group to give examples of those who forsook family, a job, old friends, or old ways of life when they became Christians, and of the blessings they received as a result.

**3.** Psalm 46 is an expression of confidence in God after a miraculous deliverance. It may have been composed following Israel's defeat of Assyria (see 2 Kings 19:35-36). Three times the author referred to a "refuge" (verses 1, 7, and 11). We may never face a great invading army, but we may well face life circumstances that cause us to long for a place of refuge. What might some of those circumstances be? How will looking to God as our refuge give us comfort in such times?

Class responses to the first question will indicate that many types of disasters and dangers could impact our lives. Potential crises include natural disasters, criminal violence, terror attacks, combat, and many other fearful circumstances. Statistics indicate that 50-60% of human beings will face at least one traumatic event in their lifetimes. Even if we never experience a natural disaster or a major crime against the public as a whole, we most likely will face personal adversity of some sort: serious illness, financial distress, antagonism toward our faith, or a variety of other situations which bring distress.

Response to the second question should bring out that simply knowing God will be with us brings immeasurable comfort. We know He is invincible, all powerful, and well able to protect us from every eventuality. Even though at the moment of crisis we may not see His protecting hand, He will be there for every child of God; we can always have hope and faith in God, and knowledge that He can intervene. Nothing will happen in our lives that He does not allow, and He promises to work everything together for good. Ask your class for examples of crisis situations in their lives when they found God to be a refuge.

**4.** One of the clearest views in the Old Testament of sin and its remedy is found in Psalm 51. In it, we read of David's response after Nathan the prophet confronted him regarding his sin with Bathsheba and his subsequent murder of Bathsheba's husband. What steps did David take, and what attitude of heart did he exhibit that eventually brought about restoration?

In verses 1-4, David cried out to God for mercy and pardon. He made no attempt to avoid

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responsibility for his actions, but acknowledged "my transgressions...mine iniquity...my sin." His obvious distress was not just because his evil deeds had been discovered—David deeply felt the guilt of his wrongdoing. He stated that he had sinned against God himself.

It is clear that David's attitude of heart was one of genuine repentance. He did not try to make excuses for his sin. He did not avoid consideration of it: he stated that his sin was always before him. Furthermore, David recognized that his sin was rooted in a sinful nature, and in verses 5-13 he also petitioned God to cleanse his heart. The word translated purge in verse 7 is intensive, meaning "un-sin" or "purify from uncleanness." David longed for renewed communion with God; his frequent repetition of the words "blot out," "wash," "cleanse," and "purge" portray the depths of his longing. This is a good opportunity to point out that God always responds to genuine repentance. Verse 17 states, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." All that David could offer God was his broken heart, but that was enough.

**5.** David wrote Psalm 55, a psalm of lament, during the time when his son Absalom was attempting to take his throne. Verses 12-14 reveal that David's pain was profound because he had been betrayed by a confidant and fellow-worshiper of God. This was likely Ahithophel, David's trusted counselor, who secretly advised Absalom regarding David's overthrow (see 2 Samuel 15:12). According to verse 22, what is the appropriate action when we suffer hurt or betrayal?

When we are hurt or betrayed, the best recourse is to cast (hurl or throw) our burdens upon the Lord. The Hebrew word translated burden in verse 22 literally means "the portion that is given you; your lot." David knew that his portion—the events that had befallen him—had been allowed by God. Just as a well-rooted tree remains stable in spite of being assailed by the wind, David had confidence that God would never "suffer" (or allow) the righteous to be overcome by circumstances. When we must endure personal hurt or betrayal, we can take hold of that same truth. Like David, we will find that God upholds and sustains us in spite of the pain.

**6.** Many of the psalms offer praise to God for His mighty works in nature. That is true of Psalm 65, a composition of David. Addressed to the chief Musician, this song was probably sung during harvest time. Looking at verses 6-13, in what specific aspects of nature did God reveal His awesome power?

Class discussion should identify the following references to nature:

• God "setteth fast the mountains" and "girded [them] with power" (verse 6)


• He "stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves" (verse 7) • He "visiteth [cares for] the earth, and waterest *it*" (verse 9) • He "preparest them corn" [supplies what is needed for growth] (verse 9) • He makes the ground "soft with showers" and blesses the "springing" thereof [causes plants to sprout forth] (verse 10) • The psalmist concluded these verses by indicating that nature proves God's abundant generosity and goodness (verses 11-13). Believers today will benefit by pondering the cosmic, comprehensive benefits provided by our sovereign God. Like the psalmist, we should respond to His gracious provision with gratitude and worship. **7.** The short hymn of praise found in Psalm 67 is separated into three parts by the refrain, "Let all the people praise thee." The first section, verses 1-2, asks God to grant favor to Israel so surrounding nations would come to know His "saving health" (or salvation). The second part looks to the future, calling the nations of the earth to be glad because God will "judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth" (verse 4). In the third section, which begins with verse 7, the psalmist continues the thought by stating that "all the ends of the earth shall fear him." When will this amazing event occur? Class response should bring out that this will occur when Jesus Christ sets up His rule on this earth during His Millennial Kingdom. Then, and only then, will all the nations of the earth praise the Lord. If time allows, this question provides a good opportunity to review with your class what will take place during the Millennial Reign of Christ, a thousand-year era of peace on earth. This period will be ushered in by the Revelation of Christ when He comes back to this earth with His saints following the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. The Battle of Armageddon will take place, marking the end of the Great Tribulation. Following the judgment of the nations, when Christ will judge the great *Gentile world powers, He will institute His earthly* Kingdom and will rule all the earth from the seat of His government in Jerusalem. This will be a time of righteousness and peace in which the people of earth will enjoy a "Garden of Eden" existence. The curse,

Conclude your summary of Christ's Millennial Reign by pointing out that only through divine inspiration could the psalmist have predicted this event—an event which, more than three thousand

which came upon the earth when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, will be lifted, and the glorious and everlasting Kingdom of Christ will be established in

peace and prosperity.

years after the psalmist composed this hymn, is still in the future.	
8. Psalm 71 records the recollections and prayers of an aged man who had experienced God's sustaining help in years gone by, and who was entreating God for continuing help in the twilight years of life. In the first section of the psalm, verses 1-8, the psalmist combined a cry to God with an affirmation of trust and remembrance of how God had been a strong refuge in all of his life. According to verse 14, what was his goal in his remaining time on earth?	
The author stated that his goal was to continue to place his hope in God, and to praise Him more and more. He acknowledged the perils of advancing years (verses 9-16), and related that his enemies had suggested that his failing physical strength proved God had forsaken him. He concluded this psalm by expressing his confidence in the One who had taught him from his youth and was the hope of his old age (verses 17-24).	
This passage should provide a good wrap-up to your study of this section of the Book of Psalms. Focus on the fact that remembering God's blessings, whatever our age, will help us to see the consistency of His mercy and lovingkindness toward us. That will bring the assurance that no matter what we may face in the days ahead, our hope can stay anchored in God. We can have confidence that He will never fail us.	
CONCLUSION	
Although David went through difficult times, he found refuge in God and was able to rejoice in the God of his salvation. The same can be true of us.	

# 444

# **Book III of The Psalms**

God be good and yet allow the righteous to suffer while

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS Psalms 73:1 through 89:52
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION
"For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." (Psalm 84:11)
BACKGROUND
Book III consists of Psalms 73 through 89. The majority of them (Psalms 73 through 83) are attributed to Asaph, a priest from the tribe of Levi who served in Jerusalem as the chief worship leader during David's reign, throughout the reign of Solomon, and into the reign of Rehoboam. He probably composed much of the music for David's psalms; Ezra 2:41 identifies him as the ancestor of the Temple singers. According to Bible scholars, during David's time several "guilds" were established to train musicians to carry on the musical traditions established by Asaph and others. Of the remaining psalms in this section, three are attributed to the "sons of Korah" (likely a family of Temple singers), David wrote Psalm 86, Heman the Ezraite wrote Psalm 88, and Ethan the Ezraite wrote Psalm 89.  The psalms in this section have been classified in various ways but some of the common groupings are: alphabetic or acrostic psalms, hallelujah psalms, historical psalms, imprecatory (invoking vengeance) psalms, Messianic psalms, penitential psalms, songs of ascent or degrees (sung by pilgrims on the way to Jerusalem), psalms of lament, and psalms of thanksgiving. Each of the major classifications is represented in this collection except for penitential.  As stated in previous lessons, Jewish tradition compares the five sections of the Book of Psalms to the first five books of the Bible. Book III has clear similarities to Leviticus in theme and scope. The purpose of Leviticus was to guide the people in their relationship with a holy God, and many of the psalms in this book focus on worship of God, His sovereignty, and His faithfulness.  The divine title primarily used in this section is El or Elohim (God), the first name for God used in Scripture (Genesis 1:1).
SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS
1. Psalm 73 opens with Asaph's comments on a
perplexing subject which is also addressed in Psalms 37 and 49 and the Book of Job: How can our all-powerful

the wicked seem to prosper? According to verses 16-17, what caused Asaph to change his viewpoint? Asaph's viewpoint was changed when he visited the sanctuary, where he was reminded that God has a larger perspective and purpose than he could see. *Until the time when all would be revealed, his help* and hope needed to be found in drawing near to the Lord (verse 28) and remembering that God had promised to be with him, hold his hand, guide him with wise counsel, and receive him to glory (verses 23-26). As a follow-up, ask your class: How can accepting Asaph's revised perspective help us in facing the same type of questions today? They should conclude that, like Asaph, we do not see the whole picture. Our earthly view is limited, as is our understanding of the ways of God. All of us at times wonder "Why?" when tragic events occur and impact countless lives. We consider that question when we hear of believers living in poverty, suffering persecution, or enduring heartbreaking trials. However, we must rest in the assurance that God has promised to be sufficient for His own, no matter what the situation. While we may not understand the why, we can be assured that He does all things well, and even incomprehensible events fit into His pattern for good. **2.** Psalm 75:2, 7 and Psalm 82:1, 8 refer to God in His capacity as the Sovereign Judge. What one word do you think best describes the nature of God's judgment? In what ways does knowledge of God's ultimate judgment affect us as believers? Your class will no doubt bring up words such as righteous, fair, just, and holy to describe God's judgment. All of these are appropriate, because God's holiness motivates His righteous judgment. Psalm 75 closes with a focus on divine retribution, indicating that those who maintain their sinful ways ultimately will face a time of accounting to God for their deeds. *In response to the second question, your group* should conclude that although our sinful deeds of the past have already been judged and dealt with at salvation, as believers we must measure our ongoing motives, attitudes, and actions by God's standard and not that of the culture which surrounds us. **3.** In Psalm 78, Asaph pleaded with the people to pay close attention as he recounted Israel's history and made known the "dark sayings" (parables) of ancient wisdom imparted by Israel's forefathers. He stressed that each generation must pass on God's commandments to the next generation. Based on

Verses 6-8 give six reasons why parents must pass on God's commandments to their children:

verses 6-8, list at least three reasons why this should

be done.

1. That the coming generation might know them. 2. That they might pass them on to their children. 3. That they might set their hope in God. 4. That they would not forget the works of God. 5. That they would keep God's commandments. 6. That they might not fall into the same errors their forefathers did. Teaching God's ways can be done in corporate worship (church), Sunday school, in the context of personal conversations and mentoring relationships, etc. However, the primary method of transmission is to be within the family unit. Adapt your follow-up discussion to the general age of your class members. If you teach young people who are still in the care of their parents, emphasis could be on the importance of paying attention to godly teaching. If your class consists of voung couples, they should be impressed with their responsibility to pass on the Gospel heritage they have received to their own children. If your group is made up of older saints, focus can be on spiritual lessons they remember from their childhoods, and the importance of passing on a legacy not only within their own family circles, but also to young believers of the next generation. Point out that no matter what our age, we are called to fulfill the three responsibilities established by the psalmist: to understand and learn from the past, to appreciate and live responsibly in the present, and to pass on the commandments of God to future generations. **4.** Psalms 74 and 79 are companion psalms which lament the destruction of Jerusalem. They reflect the horror the inhabitants of Israel felt as their territorial integrity was violated and their holy places desecrated. According to Psalm 74:1 and Psalm 79:8-9, what did the writer do in the midst of such devastation, loss, and outrage? What can we learn from this about how to handle our times of trial? *In both psalms, the writer cried out to God for* deliverance. Psalm 74:1 reveals that the extremity of distress he was experiencing caused him to conclude that God had forsaken Israel. In Psalm 79:8-9. the psalmist indicated that the calamity which had befallen the nation was related to its past sin. In response to the second question, your class should recognize that when we face calamity, we should always call upon God. If sin is the reason for the calamity, the proper response is calling upon Him in a spirit of heartfelt repentance. When the calamity has no connection to known sin, we can still look to God as our Source of deliverance, comfort, encouragement, and hope. You may wish to point out that feeling intense

emotion in times of crisis is not unusual or wrong.

Even thinking that God has forsaken us does not necessarily indicate unfaithfulness. The devil does not hesitate to attack in full force when we have experienced a sudden traumatic event. God understands the emotions that result, even if they have been intensified or skewed by the situation.

These questions provide an opportunity to refer to personal accounts of times when God responded to an anguished plea for help.

**5.** Psalm 84 is a beautiful expression of appreciation and longing for God's house. In verse 10, the psalmist declared that a day "in thy courts" (the sanctuary) was to be valued far above a thousand days spent elsewhere. What does this statement reflect about his priorities?

This statement reveals that the psalmist greatly valued spending time in God's house—doing so was clearly a priority. A literal translation of this verse states that just being allowed to stay at the threshold of the door (near God's presence) is better than dwelling in the tents of worldly men. The psalmist's concern was not the humility of the position but rather his nearness to the presence of the Lord.

As a follow-up to this question, you could discuss with your group some ways that we can show honor or appreciation for God's house. Perhaps the first and most important way is to take to heart what we hear there, and be sure to follow through in obedience. Other thoughts suggested may include: be conscious of the fact that God is present, make church attendance a priority, be careful to maintain a reverent attitude in the sanctuary, make the sanctuary a house of prayer, etc.

**6.** Psalm 85 offers praise for Israel's deliverance from captivity, and includes a prayer for the nation to turn their hearts back to God. Verse 6 asks the question, "Wilt thou not revive us again?" What is revival? What does verse 4 imply regarding the nation of Israel's part in revival?

The dictionary definition of the word revival is "renewed attention or interest in something" or "restoration of force, validity, or effect." In the original Hebrew, the word translated revival comes from a root word meaning "to live" and has the sense of "to quicken or restore to life."

While we often think of revival as being of a personal nature, the psalmist here was voicing a plea on behalf of his nation. As your group responds to the second question, comments should bring out that if a nation has turned away from God, there can be no national revival until that nation turns back to Him. Expand your discussion of this point by referring to Psalm 80:3, 7, and 19, all of which record a similar thought: "Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine: and we shall be saved."


In a personal sense as well, repentance (turning from sin to God) must precede revival. In Biblical Hebrew, the idea of repentance is represented by two verbs: shuv (to return) and nicham (to feel sorrow). In both corporate and personal application, God will only revive hearts that are wholeheartedly facing in His direction.

7. In Psalm 86:11, the writer follows several verses that describe God's nature and faithfulness with two requests: "teach me thy way, O LORD" and "unite my heart to fear thy name." How would you paraphrase this verse? Why is it important to integrate similar requests into our prayers and daily living?

Allow time for several of your students to share their paraphrases; these will be petitions for God to lead in paths that please Him and to help the one making the petition to be single in focus upon God. Point out that the phrase "unite my heart" seems to indicate the psalmist's desire for his heart to be single in its views and purposes. Like James in the New Testament, he seems to understand the danger of doublemindedness (see James 1:8).

In responding to the second question, your group should conclude that making a similar request of God will help us not to be distracted by the culture around us or the cares of life which can so easily sidetrack us from concentrated focus on Him.

**8.** Concluding the third book of the Psalms, Psalm 89 begins with the familiar words, "I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever." What is mercy, and why is it so vital in the grand plan of God?

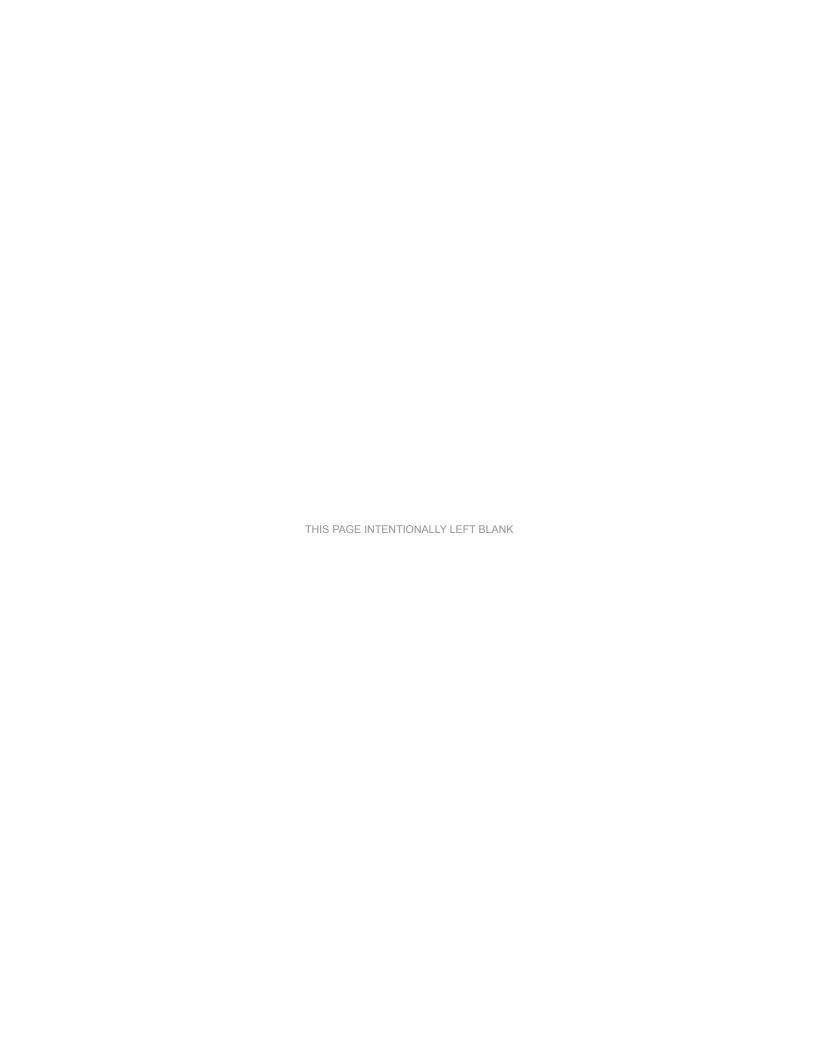
Class answers should establish that mercy is forbearance shown toward an offender. The Hebrew word for mercy is knesed, and literally means the "loving kindness" which characterizes God. This word describes the very nature of our covenant-keeping Lord.

In response to the second question, discussion should make it clear that without mercy we cannot receive salvation, because all humanity has sinned and been separated from God. God bridged the gap created by sin through His merciful act of sending Jesus to live, die, and rise again, thus offering us freedom from the penalty of sin. Lamentations 3 tells us that God's mercies are new every morning, and His faithfulness extends to every generation. Certainly that is reason to join with the psalmist in saying, "I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever."

#### CONCLUSION

The seventeen chapters in Book III of the Psalms contain the most profound writings celebrating the sovereignty of God in all of the Psalms. The closing verse of Psalm 89 provides a fitting benediction: "Blessed [be] the LORD for evermore. Amen, and Amen" (Psalm 89:52).

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# **Book IV of The Psalms**

nations, and Book IV also alludes to God's Kingdom in relation to other nations. The most frequently used name for God in this section is *Jehovah* (LORD).

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
Psalms 90:1 through 106:48	
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no	
more. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children."  (Psalm 103:15-17)	
BACKGROUND	
Psalm 90 begins Book IV of the Psalms, which continues through Psalm 106 and includes both	
the royal praise psalms (95-100) and the historical psalms (104-106), as well as others. This cluster of	
seventeen psalms is the shortest of the five sections	
in the Book of Psalms. Collected about two to three hundred years after the first three books, it probably	
was added during the time when Israel returned to	
the land under Ezra (458 B.C.) and Nehemiah (445 B.C.). Only seven psalms in the group are titled, and	
all are anonymous except for Psalm 90 (ascribed to	
Moses) and Psalms 101 and 103, which were written by David.	
According to its superscription, Psalm 90—the	
first psalm in this section—is a prayer of Moses. This	
makes it the oldest in the entire Book of Psalms, as none of the other psalms were written prior to the time	
of David. It is the only psalm ascribed to the great	
leader of Israel who delivered God's chosen people	
from bondage in Egypt. Since the psalm is primarily a	
plea for God to restore the Israelites to favor, it likely	
was composed as the forty years of wandering in the wilderness came to a close. The psalm emphasizes the	
brevity of human life, and for that reason, it is often	
included in funeral programs.	
Psalms 93 through 99 are considered by Bible	
scholars to be prophetic, foretelling some of the works	
of the coming Messiah.	
According to the Jewish tradition, this fourth	
book compares to Moses' fourth book, the Book of	
Numbers. These psalms frequently highlight Israel's	
failure and time spent in the wilderness, echoing	
the theme of the Book of Numbers. The Book of	
Numbers deals with Israel's relationship to other	

#### SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS **NOTES** 1. In Psalm 90:12, we are admonished to "number our days." What do you think this phrase means, and what will numbering our days accomplish? Your students will likely respond that to "number our days" means to pay attention to the fact that the days of our lives are passing by. The literal translation of this phrase is "Make us to know the number of our days." Doing so will help us "apply our hearts unto wisdom"—we will be aware of the brevity of life and the importance of making our moments count. (James 4:14 is a verse in the New *Testament that also alludes to the fleeting nature of* life.) Ask your group what evidence will be seen in our lives when we have applied our hearts unto wisdom. They should conclude that our focus will be on God rather than temporal pleasure and gain; we will live with eternity's values in view. We will understand the necessity of aligning our lives to Scripture, and will make choices that have positive spiritual impact on our lives and the lives of others. 2. Psalm 91 gives many wonderful promises to those who dwell "in the secret place of the most High" (verse 1). Define this secret place in your own words. Descriptions should bring out that the secret place refers to the intimacy of God's presence. To "dwell" there indicates that we live in a spirit of constant surrender, worship, and communion with God, rather than turning to Him only in times of trouble or temptation. Ask your students to name the benefits described in the remainder of this psalm which are promised to those who dwell in the secret place. They should note that God promises: • To be a refuge To deliver • To give freedom from fear • To provide victory over enemies • *To protect from evil* • To send angelic guardians · To answer prayers • To bless those who dwell in Him with eternal salvation What a beautiful hope for those who have turned to God for their security and safety! **3.** Psalm 95:7-11 is a warning not to harden our hearts as the Children of Israel did in the wilderness. How would you describe a hard heart? How can we avoid this condition? A hard heart is resistant and unyielding toward

God. It rejects truth, follows its own way, and

repeatedly spurns the promptings of the Holy Spirit. It

is the opposite of a heart that is receptive, pliable, and easily shaped by the Master's hand. Discussion of the second question should focus on the importance of being sensitive to the promptings of God's Spirit and quick to obey Him. Point out that a hard heart does not happen overnight; it is the result of a series of choices to disregard or reject God's will and way. These lead to a gradual desensitizing of our spiritual receptivity. Hebrews 4:5-11 offers New *Testament insight in how to avoid hardness of heart.* **4.** There are many ways we can praise and honor God. What method of glorifying God is identified in Psalm 96:3? What are some other ways we can glorify Him? Psalm 96:3 specifies that we should "declare" His glory. In the original Hebrew, this word means "to enumerate" or "recount." One of the best ways we can declare the greatness of God is to give our testimonies. The results of salvation are miraculous, positive, and something even sceptics cannot deny. In addition, our personal accounts of deliverance may give hope to captive souls. Relating other blessings in our lives such as healings, protection, provision, and guidance not only magnify the greatness of God, but can also encourage others to seek Him. Class discussion of the second question will likely identify observable ways we can glorify God such as through corporate worship, singing, and instrumental praise. However, you should also encourage your students to consider methods of glorifying God that are less observable outwardly, but are also vital ways of giving honor to Him. These include careful obedience to Biblical teachings, self-denial, submission of our wills, arranging our priorities to honor Him. etc. **5.** In Psalm 101, David listed several standards of behavior he wanted to follow in life. What two standards are mentioned in verse 2, and what do you think is the significance of the descriptive word he used in both of them? The two standards David established in verse 2 were that he would behave himself wisely in a perfect way, and would walk within his house with a perfect heart. As your students discuss the word perfect, you may wish to point out that in the original language, the word has a sense of both "complete" and "morally pure and without blemish." It does not imply we live without human error or never have a moment of weakness, but rather that we keep God as the center of our lives. Clearly, David's purpose was to please God by living blamelessly before Him, and

Ask your students why they think David specified that he would walk within his house in this manner. The point should be made that how we live at home really portrays what is in our hearts. Courtesy,

that should be our desire and purpose as well.

thoughtfulness, and respect should not be limited to friends and associates outside the home; we want our interaction with family members to show the same care and consideration.

Ultimately, integrity and character are best measured by what we are and do when no one is observing. If we keep a careful watch on our behavior when we are alone or in the seclusion of our own homes, the same behavior will be manifest outside our homes where all the world can see.

This leads directly to the next question, which is taken from the same psalm.

**6.** In this same psalm, why do you think David said in verse 3 that he would set no wicked thing before his eyes? How can we apply this principle in contemporary society where we are bombarded with images that do not align with Christian values?

David wanted to please and honor God; this is established by verses 1-2, which provide the basis for the specific purpose stated in verse 3. He understood that keeping his mind pure was part of pleasing God, and that what he looked at would influence him, for the eyes are a gateway to the mind. We need to do more than simply avoid participating in evil behavior; we should also refrain from viewing anything that presents evil in a positive light or increases exposure to evil in ways that could be avoided.

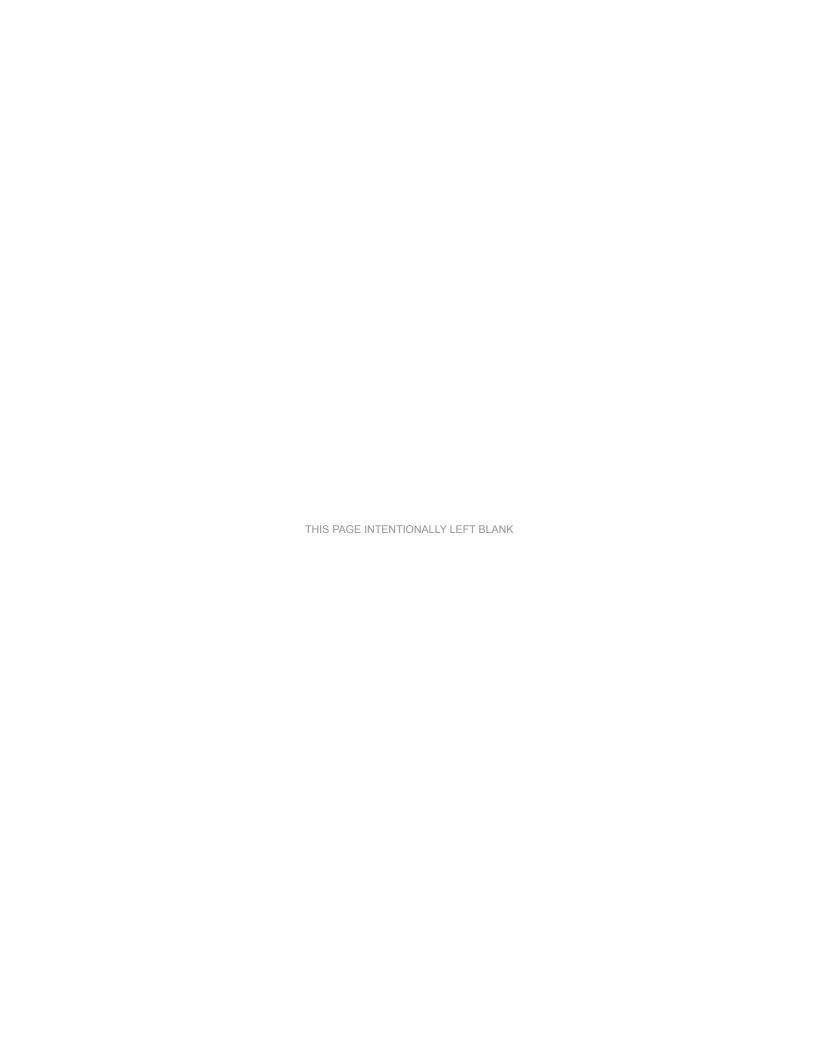
Charles Spurgeon wrote of this verse, "I will neither delight in it [in evil], aim at it, or endure it. If I have wickedness brought before me by others I will turn away from it, I will not gaze upon it with pleasure. The psalmist is very sweeping in his resolve, he declines the least, the most reputable, the most customary form of evil—no wicked thing; not only shall it not dwell in his heart, but not even before his eyes, for what fascinates the eye is very apt to gain admission into the heart."

As your group discusses the second question, they should recognize that we live in a day of relentless assault on Christian values, and this influence will eventually take its toll unless we carefully guard against it. It may be helpful to ask your group to identify specific challenges that face believers in our society with regard to the "gateway" of the eyes. They should recognize that television shows often include objectionable viewing content and off-color humor. Advertising promotes materialism and a self-centered mindset. Many movies contain immorality, immodesty, and/or extreme violence. Internet pornography is a growing industry and is easily accessed.

Obviously, we cannot entirely avoid seeing wickedness, as it is all around us. However, David was speaking of areas in which he had a choice. As Christians, we want to make viewing choices with caution and discernment, avoiding anything that

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would contaminate our thoughts or distract us from our primary purpose of serving and glorifying God.	
7. Psalm 103 is a song of praise to God which has been universally acclaimed for its beauty of expression. While it is apparent that David had experienced God's goodness personally, the benefits he cites are available to all who fear God and keep His commandments. What specific benefits are mentioned in verses 3-6?	
Verses 3-6 indicate that God forgives our iniquities, heals our diseases, redeems us from destruction, crowns us with lovingkindness and tender mercies, satisfies us with good things, and executes justice on behalf of the oppressed.	
Ask your class how many of these benefits we deserve. The answer is obvious: none! Not one of us has any right to claim these benefits based on our own merit; they are provisions we receive only because of God's abundant goodness toward us. Since we are so undeserving, the only proper response is unceasing praise and grateful remembrance—the very activities that David calls us to in verses 1 and 2.	
<b>8.</b> Many of the Psalms record words of individuals who cried out to God for help in times of great distress or need. However, in Psalm 105:4, we are told to seek the "face" of the Lord. How does seeking God's face differ from seeking His help in time of need?	
When we seek God's help, we are asking Him to provide a specific benefit or answer to prayer that we desire. There are times when it is right to petition God for the needs of ourselves and others—Jesus himself did so in His model prayer (see Matthew 6:11-13). However, a deeper seeking of the Lord occurs when we seek His face (the word "face" can also be translated "presence"). We are not looking for a particular provision or benefit, but are seeking a closer and more intimate relationship with the Giver himself. This is a place of beautiful communion and fellowship.	
As we seek the Lord, whether for a specific need or a closer walk, we should never become discouraged because we feel we have not yet attained. Nor should we think that we have all of God we need after He has answered our prayers. Verse 4 tells us to seek His face "evermore," or continually. We can never draw too close to God, and continually seeking His face will keep our connection with Him in its proper place as life's highest priority.	
CONCLUSION	
As we come before God with praise for His many benefits, and spend time getting to know Him personally, our desire to live in a manner that pleases Him will grow.	



# Teacher's Guide



## **The Great Psalm**

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
Psalm 119:1-176	
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth." (Psalm 119:89-90)	
BACKGROUND	
Psalm 119, often referred to as "The Great Psalm," is the longest chapter in the Bible; it contains 176 verses. The author is unknown, but most Bible scholars credit it either to David or the prophet Jeremiah, based upon textual references to kings, reproach, enemies, etc. Dating the psalm's composition to the time of the Babylonian captivity would point toward Jeremiah as the author; however, the context allows for an earlier date as well, making David's authorship a possibility that must also be considered.  In the original Hebrew, Psalm 119 is presented in the form of an acrostic, or alphabetical writing. While it is one of several acrostics in the Book of Psalms (others are Psalms 9 and 10 combined, along with Psalms 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, and 145), this is the longest and most intricate of these compositions. There are twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and Psalm 119 is divided into twenty-two, eight-verse sections. Each of these twenty-two sections is prefaced with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In the original Hebrew, that letter begins the first word of each of the eight verses within the section.  The clear theme of Psalm 119 is the Law of the Lord and its vital ministry in the spiritual life of believers. The word translated <i>law</i> is <i>torah</i> —a word which has a much broader meaning in Hebrew than in English. It refers to the will of God as it was made known to Israel, and has the sense of "teaching" or "instruction." A unique feature of this psalm is that all but a very few of the verses contain at least one reference to the Law of the Lord. The multifaceted manner in which the truths regarding God's instruction are presented reflects the importance of integrating Scripture into every part of life and community.	
SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS	NOTES
1. What words describing the Law of the Lord are	NOTES
used in the first section, titled Aleph? (Psalm 119:1-8)	
The words describing the Law of the Lord used in these eight verses are "law," "testimonies,"	

"ways," "precepts," "statutes," "commandments," "judgments," and "statutes" (again). It may be interesting to review with your class the slightly different shades of meaning for each of these synonyms. Law (torah) has to do with instruction by God about how to live to please Him. Testimony refers to the fact that the Hebrews were the people who received God's covenant promises; God's testimony/ covenant is sure toward His chosen people. Precept/ statute is the teaching of God through the covenant and is to be obeyed and guarded. Commandment indicates not only an order to be obeyed but implies the authority of the one giving the command, in this case, God. Way has a sense of a course of action. Judgment refers to the justice meted out by God concerning human behavior. Statute (a different Hebrew word than the one translated precept/statute above) indicates a divine decree by the Sovereign Lord of the universe. In the remaining verses of Psalm 119, we find two uses of word to indicate the commandments of God. The first usage (as in verse 9) simply refers to a divine utterance or speech proceeding from the mouth of God. As used in verse 11, word means not only an utterance but also a promise or commitment made by the one speaking. One further word referring to God's Law, translated ordinances, is used in verse 91. **2.** In Psalm 119:2, the psalmist stated that those who seek God with their "whole heart" will be blessed. Contemporary thinking views the heart as the seat of emotions. However, in the Bible the word *heart* is a far more comprehensive term which encompasses three key aspects of who we are: the intellect, the emotions, and the will. Given that description, what do you think embracing the Word with our "whole heart" might look like in everyday life? As your students offer their thoughts about how a wholehearted embrace of the Word might be lived out in our daily lives, they will likely point to attributes such as faithfulness, integrity, hunger for God, putting God first in our priorities, dedication, zeal, etc. You may wish to point out that the phrase "whole heart" also occurs in verses 10, 34, 58, 69, and 145; in these, seeking God and obeying His Word is the key message. Verse 32 gives a hint of how this is possible: "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart." When we choose to wholeheartedly embrace the Word and keep the commandments of the Lord, God provides an enlarging of our hearts, giving us an increased capacity and ability to do so. Depending upon the age and spiritual maturity of those in your class, it may be helpful to point out

that seeking God with our whole hearts does not imply human perfection. Even when our hearts are wholly fixed upon Him, there is a process of spiritual growth and maturing that takes place. We can still make errors

in judgment, but God sees that the intent of our hearts is perfect before Him. You may wish to follow up this discussion by asking your group for specific examples of those in Bible times or the history of Christianity who gave their "whole heart" to the Lord. **3.** In Psalm 119:11, the psalmist stated, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." How will hiding the Word in our hearts help us not to sin? Class discussion should bring out that Jesus himself showed how having the Word in our hearts will help us not to sin—when Satan tempted Him, He used the Word to resist the enemy. Matthew Henry says of this verse: "Good men are afraid of sin, and are in care to prevent it; and the most effectual way to prevent is to hide God's Word in our hearts, that we may answer every temptation, as our Master did, with, 'It is written...'" Based on the point developed in the preceding question, you may also wish to point out that it is with our hearts that we think, intend, know, understand, purpose, and believe. Proverbs 4:23 says that out of the heart "are the issues of life." If God's Word is hidden in our hearts, the issues of our lives are going to be affected—since Scripture directs us away from sin, the issues of our lives will also be directed away from sin. **4.** During the period of history when the psalms were composed, history and religious traditions were passed on orally. For this reason, devotional truths were often presented through music (as with many of the psalms) or as an acrostic (as with Psalm 119), as these methods promoted memorization and retention of God's Word among the Hebrew people. What are some strategies that can help us memorize passages from the Bible? It may be helpful to generate a list of the suggestions made by your class members. Ideas may include: • Listen to Scripture as you commute or engage in other tasks that do not require mental focus. • *Use an app designed to help with memorization.* • Sing songs based upon Scripture. • Post the verse on your refrigerator, mirror, or dashboard—somewhere you will see it often. Read or say it aloud each time you see it. • Take a screen shot of a Bible verse and use it as your lock screen. Each time you see the verse, say it to yourself. • Text the verse to your friends. The act of typing it out and reading it over to make sure it is correct

• Say the verse out loud.

• Set aside a specific time on a regular basis that you will devote to Scripture memorization.

• Pray that God will help you!

will impress it into your mind.

**5.** The word "delight" (or "delights") is found nine times in Psalm 119, where it is used both as a verb (for example, in verse 16) and a noun (as in verse 24). In what specific circumstances has the Word of God been a delight in your life?

You may wish to begin discussion of this question by providing a dictionary definition for both the noun and verb forms of the word "delight." The noun delight is defined as "a high degree of gratification, extreme satisfaction; something that gives great pleasure." As a verb, to delight means "to have or take great pleasure in something." In Psalm 119, the word "delight" occurs in verses 16, 24, 35, 47, 70, 77, 92, 143, and 174. Allow time for your students to share personal examples of times when the Word has brought special comfort, encouragement, or instruction to their lives.

**6.** The old English word *quicken* in verse 25 is derived from a verb form of the Hebrew *hayah*, which literally means "to give life; to revive or restore life." How is the Word of God instrumental in quickening or reviving our hearts even after we have been saved?

Class discussion should bring out that the Word of God can revive our hearts by pointing out a spiritual need, enlightening us regarding God's will, encouraging us to follow God in obedience, warning us of the dangers of failing to obey, and pointing us in the right paths that lead to life eternal. In a world full of wickedness, His Word renews our hope with its promise of ultimate victory over evil. While we may be mocked or rejected by the world, God's Word assures us of our value in God's sight—we are His creation and He loves us enough to die for us.

Bible scholars see a strong correlation between verse 25 and the familiar Genesis account of the creation of the man from the dust of the ground. The psalmist acknowledged that because of his distress of spirit, his soul clung to dust as if it were dead and buried. It was in great need of being given life, just as in the initial Creation story. Revival comes when we reach the end of our own resources and look to God for what only He can provide. Reading and meditating upon the Word in such a time will restore life and spiritual vigor to the soul.

The verb quicken (hayah) is found in nine verses throughout the Psalm (verses 25, 37, 40, 88, 107, 154, 156, and 159). If you wish to amplify your discussion of this word, review its application in these other verses.

7. In Psalm 119:36, the psalmist indicated that having a heart inclined toward God's Word would be a defense against covetousness. How would you define the word "covetousness" as used in this verse, and how do you think a focus upon God's Word would be a protection against such an attitude?

Class definitions for the word "covetousness" should bring out that it is an inordinate desire for

material things. In the context of this verse, your class should conclude that longing for the creations of God (earthly or material things) rather than God himself is actually idolatry. (In the New Testament, Paul brought out this same thought in Romans 1:25 and Ephesians 5:5). The psalmist underscores his request in verse 36 by asking in the following verse, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity [worthless things]."

As your group discusses how a focus upon God's Word provides a protection against covetousness, they should conclude that it helps us grasp the true value of what God offers: forgiveness of sin, peace and contentment in this life, and the promise of eternity in Heaven with Him. A life of discipleship is not a list of denials or negatives; it is a joyful way full of unceasing benefits, although these benefits may not be material in nature.

**8.** Relativism is a philosophical position that is popular in contemporary society. It asserts that knowledge, truth, and morality exist only in relation to culture, society, or historical context, and are not absolute. How does Psalm 119:160 refute this position? Why is the timeless nature of God's Word so comforting to believers?

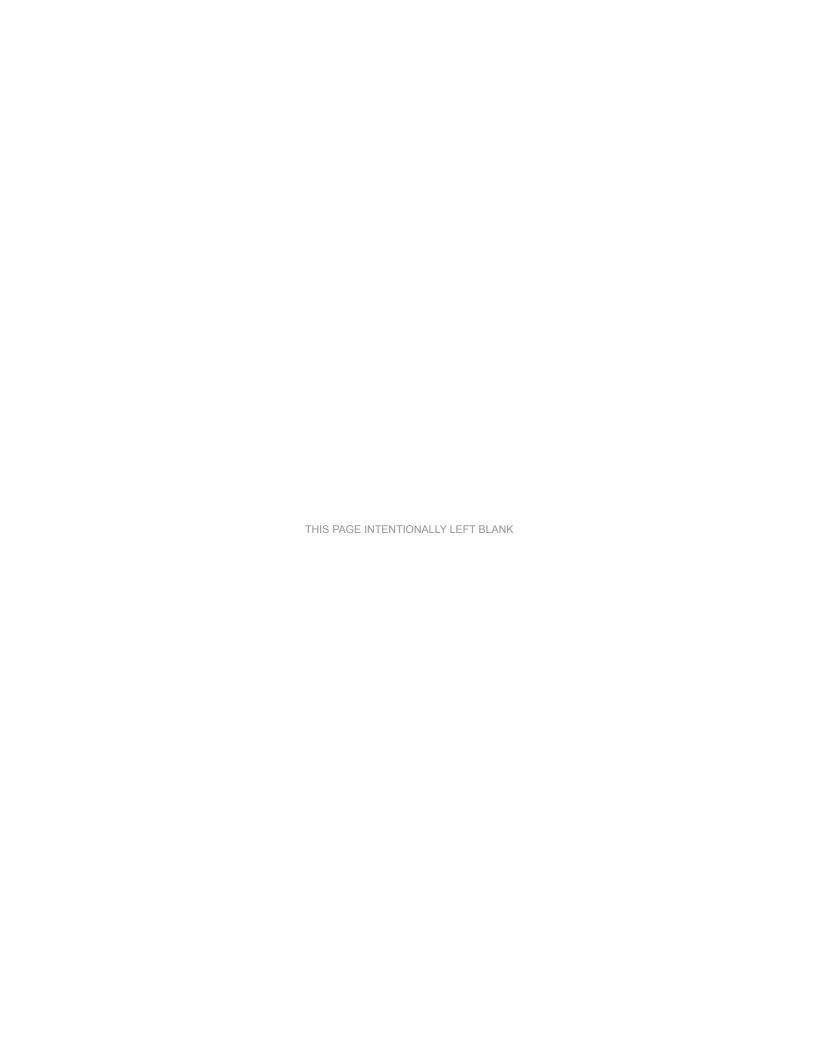
Psalm 119:160 states, "Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever." According to this verse, the principles of the Word of God are not only absolutely true but also timeless and eternal—they are applicable to every generation. This is comforting because it gives us a solid foundation upon which to build our lives. When we align our actions, attitudes, and choices to Scripture, we can be assured that our lives will be pleasing to God and that we will ultimately spend eternity in Heaven with Him. If knowledge, truth, and morality are not absolute but rather relative to culture, society, or historical context, there can be no such assurance.

You may want to follow up with a class discussion centered on how the absolute truth of God's Word can be lived and shared within a culture which marginalizes the existence of such truth. While this seems like an impossible task, it actually may be similar to the challenge faced by the Early Church in the first century with its plethora of religious tolerance and government controls imposed by Rome. That cultural setting is similar to that of the day in which we are currently attempting to live out and share the Gospel message.

#### CONCLUSION

We should embrace the encouragements in Psalm 119 and take note of the dire dangers of neglecting the Word of God—the most important foundation for our lives.

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# Teacher's Guide



## **Book V of The Psalms**

own solutions.

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS	OPENER
Psalms 107:1 through 150:6	
KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION	
"Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven." (Psalm 148:13)	
BACKGROUND	
Psalms 107 through 150 make up the fifth and final section of the Book of Psalms. Many of the forty-four psalms in Book V are thought to have been written after the Babylonian exile; Bible scholars concur that the final psalms may have been written more than a thousand years later than the earliest one.  Most of the psalms in this part of the Book of Psalms are considered liturgical in nature, meaning they were designed for use in public worship. Fifteen of them are ascribed to David, one to Solomon, and the rest remain anonymous.  The longest chapter in the Bible, Psalm 119, is in this grouping, as is the shortest chapter, Psalm 117. Psalm 117 is also the middle chapter of the entire Bible, the very center of 1,189 chapters spanning Genesis 1 through Revelation 22. Of the 31,173 verses contained in the Bible, Psalm 118:8 is the middle verse.  According to Jewish tradition, Book V relates to the Book of Deuteronomy since it speaks of a new beginning in the Promised Land. These psalms express the thoughts, prayers, and experiences of the captives at their return to Jerusalem. Jehovah is used as the divine name in this last section of the Book of Psalms.	
SUGGESTEDRESPONSETOQUESTIONS	NOTES
1. Book V begins with Psalm 107, which centers on divine intervention in the affairs of men. Verses 4 through 32 give four examples of troubles in which man could find himself: homelessness and wandering (verse 4), imprisonment (verse 10), life-threatening affliction (verses 17-18), and physical peril (verses 25-27). How did the individuals react in each situation, and what did God do in response?	
In each case, the afflicted individuals reacted to trouble by crying out to the Lord (see verses 6, 13, 19,	
and 28). Your class should understand that crying out to the Lord for deliverance is always what we should	
do in times of trouble, rather than trying to devise our	

In response to homelessness and wandering, God was a Guide leading to a "city of habitation." In response to imprisonment, God set the captives free, cutting away the "bars of iron." In response to affliction, God healed. In response to physical peril, God calmed the storm and delivered those in danger from distress, bringing them to their desired haven. Your group should conclude that God is able to help us with any situation that comes our way. There is nothing too difficult for Him! You may want to ask your class members to share personal accounts of times when God gave deliverance from troubling situations.

Conclude discussion of this question by directing your students' attention to the chorus that is repeated four times in this psalm (verses 8, 15, 21, and 31). It says, "Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" The point should be made that when God brings deliverance from trouble, we must always be sure to thank and praise Him.

**2.** Psalm 110 is one of the most outstanding Messianic and prophetic passages in the Old Testament, and is quoted more often in the New Testament than any other psalm. What roles of the Messiah are alluded to in verses 2, 4, 5, and 6?

Verse 2 refers to His role as Ruler, verse 4 refers to His role as Priest, verses 5 and 6 refer to His role as Conqueror and the One who implements final destruction of the wicked, and verse 6 refers to His role as Supreme Judge.

You may wish to amplify this discussion by pointing out that Jesus quoted from this psalm and applied its words to Himself (Matthew 22:41-45). Hebrews 1:13 uses quotes from it to prove that Jesus is greater than any angel because He alone reigns in Heaven. Additional New Testament references are 1 Corinthians 15:25, and Hebrews 5:6-10 and 7:17-21.

**3.** Psalms 113-118 are liturgical or Hallel (praise) psalms that were a part of the great annual festivals of Israel. These particular psalms were also sung in the home during the Passover meal. Psalm 113 opens with the Hebrew word *hallelu-Yah*, which means "Praise the Lord!" God is to be praised because of His glory, greatness, and mercy. What groups of people are especially noted in Psalm 113:7-9 as being the recipients of God's mercy? What principle(s) does this teach us?

Psalm 113 refers to God's mercy to the poor and needy (verses 7-8) and to the barren (verse 9). Class discussion may bring out that a person's worth in God's eyes has nothing to do with that individual's financial resources or position in society (barrenness was considered a reproach in Biblical times). God takes those who are rejected or lowly, and sets them

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among the rulers of the people. Another thought that could be developed is that God meets the needs of those who are in want.

No wonder the psalmist concluded this psalm with a repetition of the phrase it began with— "Praise the Lord!" God's compassionate care for the lowly certainly is a motivation for worship.

As a follow-up thought, ask your class how we can demonstrate by our actions that all people are valuable and useful in God's sight. Thoughts brought out may include being careful not to use derogatory words, treating others with compassion, responding to physical needs when possible, being verbally appreciative of others, etc.

**4.** Bible scholars indicate that Psalm 118 was sung by the restored exiles when they laid the foundation of the second Temple in Jerusalem (see Ezra 3:10-11). It is also thought to have been among the concluding hymns sung at Christ's last supper with His disciples, before He went into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. In verses 5-13, the psalmist focused on his trust in God. What examples did he give of ways the Lord had sustained him? In verses 8-9, what conclusion did he draw regarding the security God offers?

The psalmist offered several examples of ways the Lord had sustained him. He said that when he was in distress and called upon the Lord, the Lord answered and set him in a large place (verse 5). He indicated that the Lord was on his side (verse 6), and took his part (verse 7). When he was surrounded by enemies, the Lord helped him overcome (verses 11-13). As a result of this divine assistance, he concluded that it is better to trust in the Lord than to put one's confidence in man, or even in princes (verses 8-9). Finally, he announced that the Lord was his strength, his song, and his salvation.

While the psalmist penned his words from a personal perspective, the personal pronouns "me" and "I" also may have personified the nation of Israel. Examples certainly could be recounted of times when Israel relied upon the Lord and found Him to be their Savior and Deliverer. That is true of other nations as well.

If you wish to cite an example, some of history's most stunning evidences of divine intervention occurred during World War II. One is the event commonly referred to as "The Miracle of Dunkirk." In the summer of 1940, the Germans had pushed 400,000 Allied troops to the coast near Dunkirk, France. Allied forces feared the greatest disaster in their military history. However, Hitler unexpectedly halted the advance of the German tanks just as they were closing in for the kill. The King of England called for a National Day of Prayer, and thousands of British citizens gathered in churches across their nation to pray. During the nine days of the Dunkirk

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evacuation, the normally stormy English Channel remained calm. At the same time, a storm grounded Germany's airplanes. These unexpected events allowed nearly the whole Allied army to survive and fight again—an amazing development which British Prime Minister Winston Churchill called a "miracle of deliverance." Thousands of Englishmen gave the credit to God.

The conclusion should be reached that there is no substitute for trusting God, either as individuals or as nations.

**5.** Some Bible scholars suggest that Psalms 126, 127, and 128 relate successively to the return of the exiles from Babylonian captivity, the process of rebuilding, and the repopulating of Jerusalem. After enduring seventy years in captivity, the themes of return and restoration would have been very close to the heart of the Jewish people. Psalm 126, which probably was written at the beginning of the return which started in 538 B.C., captures many of the emotions likely felt by the exiles. While release from physical captivity is cause for great joy, what other type of deliverance could be celebrated by verses 1-3 of this psalm?

While these words could be used any time God delivers us, there is a clear parallel to the joy that is felt at spiritual deliverance—the most critical deliverance of all. God's ability to revive, renew, and restore a life ruined by sin is beyond our finite understanding. The change may be so remarkable that even the "heathen" or the ungodly will have to acknowledge that "the LORD hath done great things for them." When God radically transforms a life, instantly breaking the chains of habits and addictions that have bound an individual, there is no way to account for it except divine intervention.

This might be a good time to refer to some of the well-known testimonies in Apostolic Faith circles of hardened sinners who were completely transformed by the power of God.

**6.** What theme is developed in Psalm 133? Why is the condition described in these few verses so important among Christian believers?

The theme developed in Psalm 133 is unity, or the blessing of harmonious relationships. While identifying the topic is not challenging, it can be challenging at times to put unity into practice! However, there is no question about the fact that it is vital among Christian believers.

In response to the second question, class discussion could bring out some of the following points:

- Unity makes the church a positive example among a world full of unbelievers.
- It helps us to work together effectively in the spread of the Gospel.

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- It helps us present a united front against Satan, who seeks to destroy all believers, but especially preys upon weak and isolated individuals.
- It helps us focus our energy and attention toward spiritual matters rather than being sidetracked by tension and friction.
- It eliminates obstructions which could hinder the flow of God's Spirit among us.
- It brings a sense of completion or wholeness, making us feel good and happy.

You might wish to point out to your class that the word pleasant in verse 1 means "delightful, lovely, or beautiful." It is heartwarming to think about the divine approval which rests upon a group of sanctified, unified, believers, and should inspire all of us to make every effort to preserve this condition.

**7.** In our day, the practice of abortion is an evil that has claimed the lives of millions of innocent babies. What does Psalm 139:13-16 teach about God's role in the creation and formation of an unborn child?

These verses indicate that God has an active role in the creation and formation of an unborn child. They provide a solid basis for the Biblical truth that life begins at conception and continues to develop in the womb where God himself superintends the development and maturation of the unborn child.

Point out to your class that David did not say God created his inward parts at birth, but before birth. In verse 13, he specifically alluded to God's care of him prior to birth, stating that "thou hast covered me in my mother's womb." The word translated "covered" has the sense of something that is interwoven or knit together. The implication is that God put the parts of the body together as one who weaves a cloth. Every child in the womb is God's handiwork and part of His plan. Verse 16 also indicates that the formation of the bones, tissues, and organs of each individual unborn child are under the direct control and care of God. There are no accidents or mistakes with Him, for He is omnipotent!

You might follow up by asking your class why understanding this truth should offer encouragement to those who consider themselves of little worth. They should conclude that if the all-knowing and all-powerful God was so personally concerned with each one of us before we were even born, we can be certain that we continue to be of great value and importance to Him throughout our lives. Other passages in this psalm assure us that He knows all about us (verses 1-4), He keeps His hand over us (verse 5), He is always aware of our whereabouts (verses 7-10), and He thinks of us continually (verse 17-18). Clearly, each one of us is special and unique in God's sight, and He has a plan for our lives. See also Jeremiah 1:5 for an additional supporting Scripture.

In view of God's intimate knowledge and concern, the psalmist's closing prayer in verses 23-24 was very appropriate. Ask your students to relate what three things David asked God to do (to search his heart, to know his thoughts, and to lead him) and discuss why this should also be the prayer of our hearts.	
<b>8.</b> As we conclude our study of the Book of Psalms, what particular verse or passage from this book has been significant in your life, and why?	
This question should provide you with a good way of wrapping up your class study of the Book of Psalms. No doubt every person in the class can point to a particular psalm that has been a blessing and encouragement to him or her.	
CONCLUSION	
Like men and women through the ages, we can turn to the Book of Psalms for encouragement, comfort, guidance, and hope. And perhaps there are no more fitting words to conclude our study than the closing words of the final psalm, "Praise ye the LORD" (Psalm 150:6).	