



DISCOVERY **TEACHER'S GUIDE**

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The Way of Wisdom

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

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.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. 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 *beginning* 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, anxiety, or dread. Rather, “the fear of the LORD”

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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.

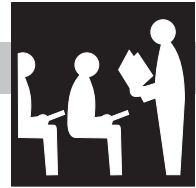
8. Chapter 9, the conclusion of Solomon's wisdom speeches, reviews the major themes already spelled out in the first eight chapters of the book. How does verse 10 of this chapter summarize Solomon's message in these nine introductory chapters to the Book of Proverbs?

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 answer?

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The Proverbs of Solomon

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Proverbs 10:1 through 22:16

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).

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

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 help in every part of life and bring eternal benefits as

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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.

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.

8. 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.

9. 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

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.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

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?

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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

As we heed the wisdom offered by the godly, we will find our lives enriched on this earth. And there will be even greater treasure awaiting us in Heaven.

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A Collection of Proverbs

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

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 *copied* 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 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

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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?

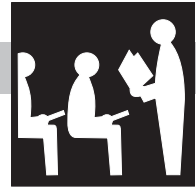
There is no right or wrong answer to this question, but it should elicit some valuable class discussion. You may wish to point out that many of these principles of industry and strength of character can apply to men as well.

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.



The Book of Ecclesiastes

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Ecclesiastes 1:1 through 12:14

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 *hebel*, translated in various Biblical passages as *vanity*, *futility*, *meaninglessness*, *mystery*, or *enigma*. 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 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

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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

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,



The Song of Solomon

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

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 interpretations 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 Pharaoh; 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 *Daybreak* and *Discovery*. 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 Solomon offers a beautifully descriptive celebration

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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.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

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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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).

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

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

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

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

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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The Shepherd's Psalm

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

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 about the shepherd care of God. However, it is still traditionally sung by Jews in Hebrew at their Sabbath meal on Saturday afternoon.

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

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grief, He will provide comfort. If they include remorse or failure, He will correct us, but He will do so with mercy; His goal is always to restore and renew.

Wrap up your session by reviewing together the closing words of this psalm: "I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever." What a glorious hope for those who closely follow the Good Shepherd!

CONCLUSION

When considering how simply Psalm 23 shows God's care, protection, and love for us, it is no mystery that it is one of the most frequently recited, referenced, and memorized groups of verses in all of Scripture.



Book II of The Psalms

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

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 *Shoshannim* (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 *Alamoth*, 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 *Neginoth* 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).

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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?

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.

Since verses 6-8 allude prophetically to Christ (a 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.

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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)

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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.



Book III of The Psalms

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).

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

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 God be good and yet allow the righteous to suffer while

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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, list at least three reasons why this should be done.

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

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 young 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.

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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 khased, 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

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

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 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).

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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

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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 that should be our desire and purpose as well.

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,

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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.

8. 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.

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The Great Psalm

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

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 *law* is *torah*—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.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

- 1. What words describing the Law of the Lord are 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,”

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“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 will impress it into your mind.*
- *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!*

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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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Book V of The Psalms

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

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.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

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 own solutions.

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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.*
