

THE BOOK OF

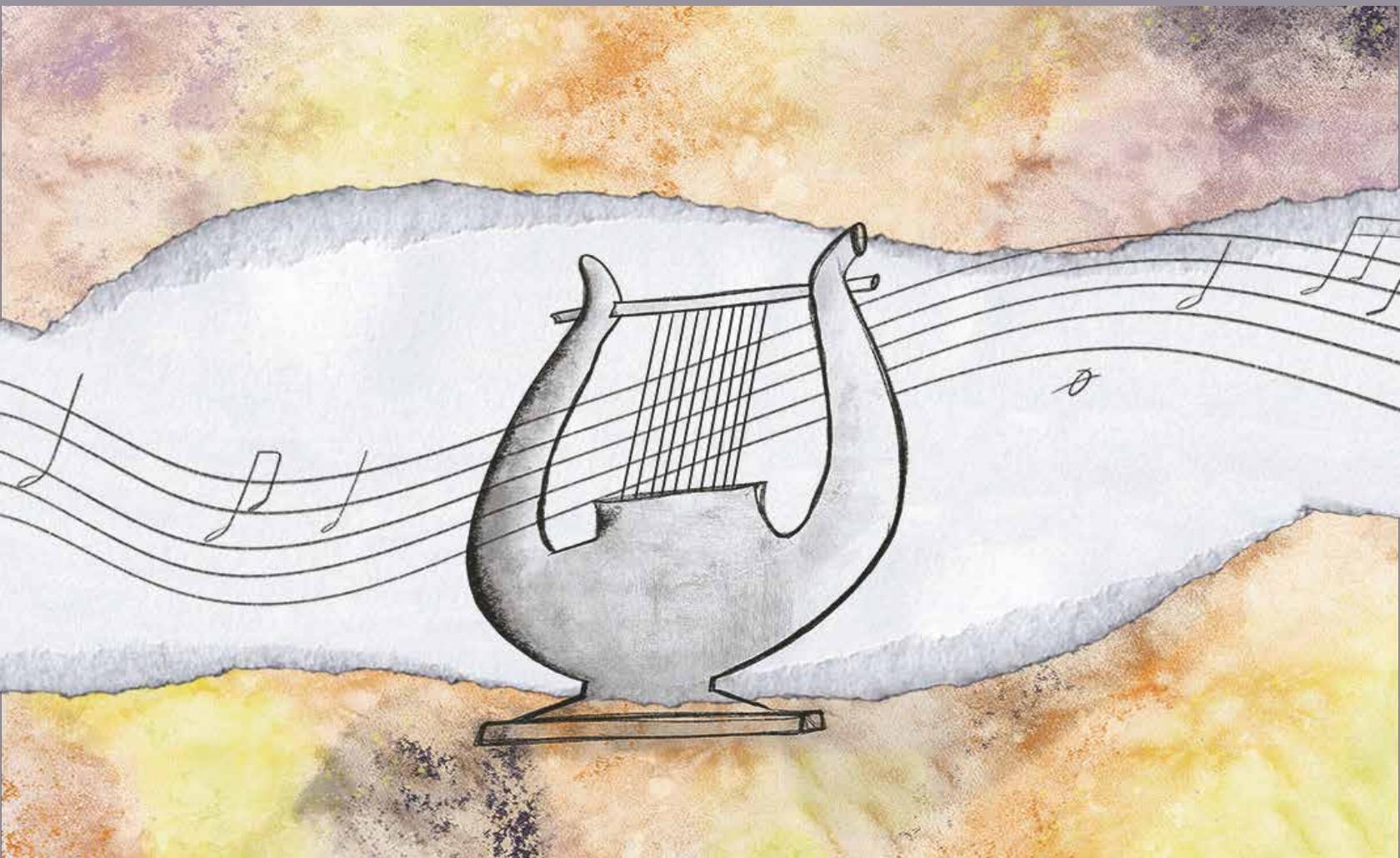
Psalms

TEACHER RESOURCE

Bible
Study

The Traveling Songs of God's People

"GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD, FOR HE IS GOOD,
FOR HIS STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER"



TEACHER RESOURCE

Psalms

Fall Bible Study –Teacher Resource

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Thesis Overview

Study Title: *Psalms – The Travelling Songs of God’s People*

Thesis: **The Psalms draw us into God’s story and give voice to our own.**

Weekly lesson theses are **bold**, and supporting main ideas (two per lesson) are *italicized*.

The Psalms draw us into God’s story and give voice to our own. From the foundation of the world, God has been building His kingdom here on earth. Through His covenant promise to Abraham, He chose a people to declare His own and promised them a land and a king. In doing this, His story became their story. And their story is now ours. Their rich language of poetry sings this story with beauty and cadence. The various categories of psalms resonate with the myriad seasons of their lives—and ours. Whether through hymns of praise or laments of deep despair, the book of Psalms invites us to join our voice to the chorus as one people singing a symphony to our God.

The first movement is Book 1, composed of Psalms 1–41, and here we see the story open with **CONFRONTATION**. Through miraculous circumstances and over centuries, God fulfilled His covenant promises to Abraham, proving that **the Lord reigns from eternity to eternity**. The people received the land and a king through Moses and Joshua, and in David, who confronts numerous enemies before sitting on the throne as God’s representative ruler. But *the Lord’s reign entails confrontation for humanity*. David is confronted with many enemies who are opposed to God’s righteous kingdom. Yet the Lord is always faithful! When His people turn from wickedness and choose to trust Him, *the Lord protects the righteous on their path*.

The second movement is Book 2, composed of Psalms 42–72, and the theme of **COMMUNICATION** is brought forward here. God’s righteous rule is not only for the people of Israel; **God desires and invites all people to know Him**. This is the essence of what it means to be blessed—the transformative experience of knowing God as the giver. In this way, *God blesses through communication*. His blessed people become heralds of this blessed gift to ourselves, to others, and even back to Him as we acknowledge who He is and what He has done. *God’s people know, remember, and share His blessings*.

Yet we are a forgetful people. Israel and her kings forget their God and choose to follow the path of the wicked. Book 3, composed of Psalms 73–89, ushers in **DEVASTATION**. In His sovereignty, God brings devastation both within and eventually from outside the kingdom through war, famine, and exile. But it is to wake His people up from forgetfulness, rather than to show He has abandoned them. **God never leaves nor forsakes His people**. Though we may move away from Him, He remains always present to correct, to comfort, and to protect. *The LORD is our sovereign sanctuary in the midst of devastation*. This truth compels His people to draw near to God once again. He is our only help in trouble and offers compassion to those who turn back to Him. Therefore, *God’s people cry out to Him in suffering* knowing He will hear and rescue them.

Devastation brings forth **MATURATION** in Book 4, composed of Psalms 90–106. God wants His people to flourish and is zealous for them to bear fruit to the end. Like a skillful gardener, **God prunes, endures, and gives hope to His people**, even using devastation to cut away what hinders our growth.

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It is a mark of His steadfast love that He will not leave us as infants in our faith. *God is faithful to mature His people.* The exiled people of Israel show us that growing in maturity means trusting God in the devastation and counting Him worthy of worship, regardless of present suffering. When faced with hardships, *the righteous respond in humility and praise* through remembrance, confession, repentance, and thanksgiving.

Book 5 crescendos this symphony into RESTORATION with Psalms 107–150. As His people grow in maturity, they look forward to the day when God's reign is realized in its fullness. And it will be realized, because **God always fulfills His promises and purposes.** Israel's restoration in the land of promise after exile is a precursor to the ultimate restoration that will be experienced in all heaven and earth when *God brings restoration to all things* through the return of our Messiah, King Jesus. Then, not only His people will give praise to His glorious name, but all creation will join in the chorus. All will know that He has created, sustained, redeemed, and restored all things to Himself. As we enjoy His blessings now and await that coming day of jubilee, *let everything that has breath praise the Lord!*

The beauty of God's story reveals the beauty of our own, even its lowest moments, for everything it proclaims sings the story of His redeeming love for us. As we take in the Psalms, we find lyrics for our own life of faith and are pointed to Jesus as the center of it all. **The Psalms draw us into God's story and give voice to our own.**

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Class Overview

Class Week	Thesis and Subpoints		Homework (following lesson)
Lesson 1 Invitation + Introduction	Thesis: The Psalms invite us to encounter God and to conform our lives to the story He is telling.		Psalms 34, 44, 109, 146, 15
	How & Why	Main Idea 1: God has a purpose in why and how we study the Psalms.	
	What	Main Idea 2: The Psalms draw us into God's story and give voice to our own.	
Lesson 2 Book 1	Thesis: The Lord reigns from eternity to eternity.		Psalms 2, 6, 19, 29, 37
	Book Theme: Confrontation	Main Idea 1: The Lord's reign entails confrontation for humanity.	
	Bookends: Psalm 1, Psalm 41	Main Idea 2: The Lord protects the righteous on their path.	
Lesson 3 Book 2	Thesis: God desires and invites all people to know Him.		Psalms 46, 49, 51, 63, 69
	Book Theme: Communication	Main Idea 1: God blesses through communication.	
	Bookends: 42, 72	Main Idea 2: God's people know, remember, and share His blessings.	
Lesson 4 Book 3	Thesis: God never leaves nor forsakes His people.		Psalms 74, 78, 80, 84, 88
	Book Theme: Devastation	Main Idea 1: The LORD is our sovereign sanctuary in the midst of devastation.	
	Bookends: 73, 89	Main Idea 2: God's people cry out to Him in suffering.	
Lesson 5 Book 4	Thesis: God prunes, endures, and gives hope to His people.		Psalms 92, 94, 99, 101, 102
	Book Theme:	Main Idea 1: God is faithful to mature His people.	

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	Maturation		
	Bookends: 90, 106	Main Idea 2: The righteous respond in humility and praise.	
Lesson 6			
Book 5	Thesis: God always fulfills His promises and purposes.		Psalms 110, 111, 127, 137, 147
	Book Theme: Restoration	Main Idea 1: God brings restoration to all things.	
	Bookends: 107, 150	Main Idea 2: Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!	
Lesson 7			
Recap	Thesis: The Psalms draw us into God's story and give voice to our own.		none
	God's Story (Recap)	Main Idea 1: The Psalms draw us into God's story...	
	Our Voice (Say-So)	Main Idea 2: ...and give voice to our own.	

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Lesson Outline Guide Overview

What Is Included

The remainder of this document will serve as a reference guide for teachers to utilize in preparation for their weekly lessons for this seven-week class surveying the book of Psalms. Content provided should assist teachers in incorporating the 5 E's essential for strong lessons, ensure greater cohesion and consistency across multiple teachers' lessons, and support theological precision and coordination with the student workbook.

Each weekly lesson outline guide includes:

- **Lesson Thesis**
 - Each week's class thesis was determined by the Teacher Resource Cohort in support of the overall class thesis for teaching this Psalms study. Each lesson thesis is supported by two (sub) points from the text, and sets students up for what they will study in their homework the week *following* the lesson.
 - Students will understand these theses as the "main ideas" of the text.
- **Lesson Outline Guide** — This has two suggestions (A and B) for each of the 5 E's (except EXPLAIN where the objective is to teach the main point of the corresponding text range).
 - INTRODUCTION
 - ENGAGE: Introduction and hook suggestions (A and B) to set up the **Lesson Thesis**
 - EXPLORE: Aid students in wrestling with question before answer is taught
 - EXPLAIN: **Main Point 1**
 - Supporting observations and interpretations of text Main Idea 1
 - ELABORATION suggestions (A and B), including discussion question option
 - EVALUATION suggestions (A and B), including discussion question option
 - TRANSITION (between Main Point 1 and Main Point 2)
 - EXPLAIN: **Main Point 2**
 - Supporting observations and interpretations of text Main Point 2
 - ELABORATION suggestions (A and B), including discussion question option
 - EVALUATION suggestions (A and B), including discussion question option
 - CONCLUSION — Wrap up and check for understanding of overall lesson
- **Student Workbook Snapshot** — A reminder for teachers of what the students will study the following week

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How to Use It

STUDY, PRAY, CONSULT, WRITE

The Lesson Outline Guide is meant to serve as a resource for teachers to encourage thoughtful inclusion of the 5 E's, but is not intended to limit the Spirit-led gifting in each teacher to write their manuscript aligned with class objectives. The 5 E's should be incorporated into each lesson to maximize student retention, but teachers are not bound to the options provided (A or B) in the Lesson Outline Guide.

Each week's thesis and supporting main points (two for each lesson) come from the individual and collective studying of the Teacher Resource Cohort and may not match the exact wording of the student workbook.

Teachers are encouraged to study the text on their own, pray for God's help as they prepare for each lesson, consult the Lesson Outline Guide, and write each original manuscript with the class thesis, lesson thesis, main points of the text, and their audience in mind.

Tips:

- Be mindful of your personal biases in teaching. Find a teaching "buddy" who will review your manuscript to help you teach to the **head, hands, and heart**.
- Be familiar with the **student workbook** and the REAP tools the students are introduced to in a given week. Our goal is to teach the Word of God in a way that is clear, compelling, and true, and being familiar with how the student will be guided through the text in their study is an essential part of that!
- Make sure you think through **transitions**. The Lesson Outline Guide is full of great ideas to incorporate the 5 E's into your lesson, but you will need to draft your manuscript and add transitions for the final lesson to be smooth, clear, and easy to follow for students.
- If you are splitting a lesson with a **co-teacher**, think through the entire two-hour class together before dividing it into sections to ensure that the lesson thesis and supporting main points are taught cohesively, that 5 E's are included (not necessarily for every component), and students still hear one complete lesson, even if through two voices.
- If you are teaching with a co-teacher for the duration of the class, engage with the manuscript that came before you—either by listening in class or by reading it before you write yours—in order to preserve class cohesion across all seven weeks.

PLAN YOUR TIME

Teachers are encouraged to write each lesson manuscript for the **two-hour class** with the following overall structure in order to maximize student interaction with the text and with one another:

- Intro: 10 minutes
- Main Point 1 Teaching: 20 minutes
 - Discussion: 20–25 minutes
- Main Point 2 Teaching: 20–25 minutes
 - Discussion: 20 minutes

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- Conclusion: 10 minutes
- ** The remaining 10 minutes can be added to the beginning of class in order to facilitate *prompted* discussion of homework from the previous week or at the end of class to encourage extended discussion and/or prayer as a table.

Tips:

- Let students know that there will not be extended time spent reviewing the specifics of the previous week's **homework** in detail, but the time they spend in the text and doing the homework will not only be fruitful because it's time with Jesus, but because it will help them make the most of class.
 - Encourage table groups to have a group text thread for discussion of questions and encouragement as they do their homework!
- If you do opt to give tables additional time (up to 10 minutes) at the beginning of class to discuss homework, please do the following:
 - *Select a specific question* in the homework for them to discuss that supports the thesis for that week's lesson. Consider incorporation into an EXPLORE activity by asking tables to share key takeaways or questions with the class as part of your introduction time and as a way to transition into your lesson.
 - *Tell the table leaders ahead of time* that there will be extended time that week *and* give them the homework question you want them to facilitate discussion around. Table leaders have not been given additional resources and vary in biblical literacy and maturity, so be thoughtful about the question you select.
 - *Follow up* with table leaders as a way to support their leadership and to make sure they feel adequately resourced for what is being asked of them.
- Remember that *you* are not the only teacher in the room. Work diligently in editing your manuscript for word count/time so you do not have to cut **discussion time**. Let the students learn from each other!

Attributions

The Lesson Outline Guide was compiled by a cohort of teachers from the Women's Ministry of The Austin Stone in collaboration with the Teacher Development Program. They represent a variety of teaching styles, but all aimed at the same goal: to help our Bible study teachers teach the Word of God in a way that is clear, compelling, and true. After individual study, the cohort of teachers worked together as a team to outline the main idea of each text range that supported the overall thesis of the book for class as well as supporting theses for its sub-books. The Lesson Outline for each class week was then written and edited by teachers on the team, with particular focus on providing suggestions for inclusion of the essential elements of an effective lesson (5 E's). The guide was then reviewed by a TAS elder to ensure theological consistency and precision.

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The following individuals contributed to the Lesson Outline Guide. THANK YOU!

- Lesson Outline Writers: Lauren Fischer, Annette Haralson, Christine Hoover, Lindsey Lundin
- Lesson Outline Editors: Annette Haralson
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Special thanks to Erin Feldman, author of the *Psalms: The Travelling Songs of God's People* (this study's student workbook), who aided the Teacher Resource Cohort throughout the process to ensure alignment with the student workbook.

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Lesson 1: Invitation & Introduction

Lesson 1 Thesis

Psalms Thesis: The Psalms draw us into God's story and give voice to our own.

Lesson 1 Thesis: The Psalms invite us to encounter God and to conform our lives to the story He is telling.

This week will give students an introduction to the Bible study environment and an overview of the book of Psalms. It should cover the following:

- 1) WHY we study the Word of God—emphasis on the relationship with God and that we study so that we can know Him, because He loves us.
- 2) HOW we're going to study (including class logistics, walking through the class resources, etc.) and the overall posture we take toward our method of study.
- 3) WHAT we're going to study in the book of Psalms—specifically introduce genre, historical and theological contexts, as well as key themes so that students have a foundation to build upon as they study.

Thesis Summary: **The Psalms draw us into God's story and give voice to our own.** From the foundation of the world, God has been building His kingdom here on earth. Through His covenant promise to Abraham, He chose a people to declare His own and promised them a land and a king. In doing this, His story became their story. And their story is now ours. Their rich language of poetry sings this story with beauty and cadence. The various categories of psalms resonate with the myriad seasons of their lives—and ours. Whether through hymns of praise or laments of deep despair, the book of Psalms invites us to join our voice to the chorus as one people singing a symphony to our God.

Lesson 1 Outline Guide

INTRODUCTION

The beginning of class this week should include a welcome and introductions. Be sure to do a few important things before and right at the beginning of class:

- Ensure that the room is fully set up, arranged in a way that encourages connection, and free from distraction. Tables should be pre-set with the number of chairs (ideally 6–8) at each predetermined table group (including table leader). Student resources should be set out on tables or handed out at check-in.
- Table leaders should be there early to greet students as they arrive. Name tags should be available and encouraged for everyone.
- Once you open the class with an introduction, be sure to share a little bit about yourself and why you're excited to be part of this class environment. If you have a co-teacher, apprentice, or class

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host, make sure you briefly introduce them. Introduce table leaders as well. Have them raise their hands so you can point them out and explain their role.

- Set any expectations and share any housekeeping items you have for the class (i.e. start time, engaging in discussion, treating one another with dignity and respect, etc.).
- Mention the overall thesis (or for students, the “main idea”) of Psalms—*The Psalms draw us into God’s story and give voice to our own*—as you transition into the class focus for the next six weeks. Specify that each week we will look at the big picture of the way the book of Psalms is structured as well as look at individual psalms, and that doing both will point to the truth of that thesis (or “main idea”). Share that for *this* week, we will not look at a particular psalm, but instead, start by establishing some important anchors as we study God’s Word together.
- **** This week’s lesson has *three* main points (how, why, what) instead of two like all subsequent weeks. ****

WELCOME Ice-breakers + Introductions
Suggestion A
<p>Ice-breaker questions at table groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What part of town do you live in? What is your favorite place to eat in that area? ● If you could live in one fictional story (book, movie, TV show), which would it be and why?
Suggestion B
<p>Elevator introductions – <i>Following the teacher’s example, have each student introduce themselves to their cohort as though they have only a single elevator ride (and elevator rides are short!).</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Example: Name, where you grew up, one way your hometown has shaped you, how long you have been in Austin, etc.</i>

Lesson ENGAGE: Introduction and Hook Suggestions (include Lesson Thesis)
<p><i>This week will give students an introduction to the Bible study environment and an overview of the book of Psalms.</i></p>
Suggestion A
<p>Chances are that many of you walked into this room feeling a combination of positive and negative emotions—excited, weary, hopeful. Maybe you’re excited for two kid-free hours, or hopeful to grow in God’s Word and make new friends. Or maybe you’re feeling overextended at work, overlooked by God, or overwhelmed by suffering and sorrow. The common need in all of these emotions is that we are each broken people in deep need for restoration. And this is why we are so thankful you are here.</p> <p><i>(Put up a picture of Kintsugi pottery on screen.)</i></p>

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This is a piece of pottery that was once broken beyond repair. But do you see those beautiful gold joints? This was an artisan's solution to broken pottery. The ancient art of repairing broken pottery into a masterful new piece is called *Kintsugi* (pronounced "kin-soo-gee"). It comes from the Japanese words *kin* meaning "golden" and *tsugi* meaning "joining"—golden joinery. It's all about beautifully mending a broken thing. The artform came about in the 15th century because an emperor was unhappy with the way an artisan repaired a broken, but prized piece of pottery. So the emperor commissioned a different artisan to come up with a way to repair his broken pottery. Instead of hiding the fractures or discarding the broken pieces, the second craftsman used golden, silver, and platinum powders to emblazon the cracks.

What a beautiful visual for what God has done for us! We are all broken. But God has given us His Word to restore us, repair our broken pieces, and conform us back to the way we should be. Until heaven, we will still see our broken places, but God's Word helps make sense of the suffering and sorrow in our stories. The glorious work of Christ transforms us into new creations. And this is why we're here—to grow in our knowledge and affection for Jesus and be conformed to His Word.

Psalm 19:7–8 says:

"The instruction of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul.
His testimony is trustworthy and it will make us wise!
The precepts of the Lord are right and make the heart glad;
the command of the Lord is radiant and will enlighten our eyes."

God's Word—the entire redemptive story of Scripture—is our hope for a restored soul. To be *restored* means to be repaired or conformed back to a former condition. Your soul is the deepest part of your being—it's the essence of who you are. Only the Word of God is able to renew and restore our soul to experience Jesus, life (and life abundantly), and freedom from sin. And the way that happens is through encountering God in His Word and conforming to His redemptive story.

There is no ideology, philosophy, or self-care habit that is able to crawl into the deepest places of your being and restore it. Only the living and active Word of God is able to do that. What we want you to

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see today is that **the Psalms invite us to encounter God and to conform our lives to the story He is telling.**

Suggestion B

Why are we here? Why did each of you sign up to devote hours of your week to reading, studying, and learning about the book of Psalms? We know that saying yes to this class requires you to say *no* to something else. And let's be real, the Austin area is jam-packed with things to do. Our time is limited. So we don't take it lightly that you have chosen to give your time to this study. We want to help you see that it will be worth it!

Think about a time when you were in a hurry and didn't take the time to learn how to use a tool or product thoroughly but instead ended up only using a fraction of its intended use. Or you may use the following example and attribute it to "another teacher here at The Austin Stone."

Illustration example: I bought this keychain bottle opener once because I really, really like Mexican coke in those glass bottles, and there were too many times when I would order one from Torchy's drive-thru and forget to ask them to open it before I drove off. I found out the hard way that those bottle caps are not the kind you can simply unscrew. SO FRUSTRATING! So I got this cheap bottle opener that looked like a key and would fit on my keychain. But what I didn't realize is that it could do so much more than just open bottles. It was a multi tool—it could be used to tighten and untighten hex and flathead screws; it had a notch on the end that made it a perfect box opener; it had a straight edge that was exactly one inch long so it could be used as a ruler. Without knowing all this, was I able to use this tool for the task I initially bought it for? Absolutely! But once I took the time to learn more about this tool, it made it even more useful, even more valuable. Now I go to the tool not just to open bottles but for many more things. Knowing more about the design and intention of that tool made all the difference!

Knowing the design and intention for God's Word in our lives will change the way we value and use it. This is especially true for the book of Psalms. **The Psalms invite us to encounter God and to conform our lives to the story He is telling.** If you are like most people who have spent any time at all in God's Word, you have likely read and enjoyed many of the different psalms. But did you know that the collection of psalms are structured in such a way as to tell the big picture of God's redemptive story through history? Did you know that the place any individual psalm is located within the entire book of Psalms will point to a particular theme within redemptive history?

When we know things like this about any part of God's Word, we are able to unlock layers of meaning that add richness and value to our study of His Word. This is time well spent.

Lesson EXPLORE: Activity and/or Discussion Suggestions

How can students wrestle with the topic before it is taught?

Suggestion A

- What do you turn to when you're feeling ragged, weary, and depleted? (e.g. Bible, Netflix, friends, alone time, long run, massage, etc.)
 - If it's not the Bible, what do you think keeps you from turning to Scripture for the

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restoration your soul needs?

- What ways have you seen these other sources fail you or disappoint you?
- How have you seen the Bible satisfy you? What are some practical ways you can remind yourself that the Bible is the better source for soul restoration?

Suggestion B

- What are your motivations and hopes for studying God's Word together over the next seven weeks?
- What do you see to be the designed benefit of studying God's Word with others? What do you care most about when it comes to studying the Bible?

EXPLAIN: Main Point 1-A

Main Point 1-A: God has a purpose in WHY and how we study the Psalms.

Why do we study the Bible? Because **God wants to be known by us, which will transform us, because He loves us.**

We could spend hours talking about why we should study the Bible, why we sometimes struggle to study the Bible, and why it's often difficult to walk in obedience to the Scriptures. For the sake of time, let's focus on three:

1. The Bible is necessary to know God.
2. The Bible is necessary for salvation, freedom, and transformation.
3. The Bible is necessary to understand ourselves and know how to navigate our lives.

The Bible is necessary to know God.

- Consider the great lengths God goes to to ensure that we know Him.
 - In the beginning He spoke to prophets establishing His love, sovereignty, and wisdom as their guide to flourish in life (Hebrews 1:1–2).
 - He sent His Son—the embodied Word—to live among humanity (John 1:1; Hebrews 1:1–2).
 - He revealed Himself in all of creation (Romans 1:20).
 - He wrote all His Word down for us (2 Timothy 3:16).

God wants us to know His character and how He feels about things (primarily His glory and the good news of the gospel for His creation), what is important to Him, how to know Him, and how to experience a restorative relationship with Him.

- We instinctively get this desire to be known. Think about how many times you've said or heard the words, "I just want to be known." Our desire to be known is not our idea—it's God's.

The Bible is necessary for salvation, freedom, and transformation.

- In Romans 10:13–17, Paul lays out an argument for the necessity of the Bible with a few rhetorical questions. He says, "For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'"

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- Every question Paul posits is aimed toward a single common goal: salvation. Salvation comes through faith in the work of Jesus Christ, and we gain knowledge of the work of Christ through reading the Bible or hearing someone preach the gospel.
- Our salvation brings freedom (Galatians 5:1) and transformation to be like Him (2 Corinthians 3:18, John 15:4). Empowered by the Spirit, the Bible makes us complete and equipped (2 Timothy 3:17).

The Bible is necessary to understand ourselves and know how to navigate our lives.

- The advice to “know thyself” is ancient, yet we are all still trying to abide by it. People quit their jobs, take gap years, travel, and live in the woods in an effort to find out who they are. But Scripture shows us that if we really want to know ourselves and know how to live a meaningful and free life, we need to open our Bibles.
- We were born into sin, which means that every part of us is broken—our minds, our hearts, our very souls. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick [or wretched, frail, incurable]; who can understand it?” Even our own hearts are lying to us! It means that we need an outside source to come in, expose, and reveal our brokenness to us, so that we can see our need for Jesus.
- God not only gives us the wisdom and knowledge to live a life that is pleasing to God, but He also gives us the Spirit within us to empower us to obey His promises and warnings (Psalm 19:7, 2 Peter 1:3).

God does all of this (because He does all things) for the simplest, most profound reason—because He is love (1 John 4:16).

- One theme in the overarching story of Scripture is God pursuing His people so that they will know Him and love Him—because it is what is best for them (Psalm 16:11)!
- **God wants to be known by us, which will transform us, because He loves us.**

ELABORATE

How can students deepen their understanding and apply it to their lives?

Suggestion A

We could spend days talking through all the ways and reasons we need the Bible, but the problem is we still struggle to stay committed to it. Why? Again, lots of reasons, but one of the foundational reasons is that we don’t *believe* that we need it. We believe that we can intuit—or use our conscious, instinctive reasoning—to know God and live godly lives.

Share an illustration that shows how not believing our need for instruction can get us in trouble.

- *Example:* I shudder to admit that in my younger years I was an insufferable know-it-all—think Hermione Granger in the first *Harry Potter* book, when *nobody* liked her because she thought she knew everything about everything. One year on the first day of class, one of our teachers had us take a test that he said would help him gauge where we were in our understanding. Oh, I was all over that! I was ready to prove that I was the smartest person in the room. So the minute he said “Begin,” I was like a racehorse out of the starting block. At the start of the test was the instruction to thoroughly read all the questions before beginning. But to me, that would

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just waste time. And I had learned that part of the fun of taking a test was being the first one to finish. So I got down to business and began answering as I went along. But about halfway through the time, I started to notice students getting up to hand in their papers. I couldn't understand how they were finishing so quickly. Then I began to notice several of them giggling—and giggling *at me!* That's when I finally did what I should have done from the beginning. I followed the instructions and began reading through all the questions. And when I got to the last question it read, "Write your name at the top of your paper and turn it in without writing down the answers to any of the questions."

When we think we know it all without taking the time to read what is meant to instruct us, we can make huge mistakes and often show just how incapable we are of knowing what is right on our own. The Bible is necessary to know God; necessary for salvation, freedom, and transformation; and necessary to understand ourselves and know how to navigate our lives. If we truly believe this, then we will devote time to reading and understanding it.

Discussion Questions:

- What keeps you from feeling the need for the Bible to know God?
- What is one barrier to devoting yourself to the Word that you are asking God to tear down this semester?

Suggestion B

Whether or not we believe something is (and should be) greatly influenced by whether or not we trust the source of that information. If you think the source is objective and honest about their perspective and intentions, you're likely to believe them. If you think they are manipulating the truth or conspiring against it for some sort of gain, you won't believe them.

The Netflix documentary *Beyond the Curve* (2018) tells the story of a small but growing community of people who believe the earth is flat (not a sphere). They are not compelled by scientific data, because they don't trust the scientific community. They believe there are world powers (political, religious, scientific, financial, etc.) that are motivated to conspire together to perpetuate the lie of a spherical earth for their own power and position. In the view of the flat-earthers, no amount of astrophysics will compel them to change their minds because all of the people behind the data have been corrupted and/or duped into lying.

The heart and intentions behind an information source is often more compelling to us than any data behind a truth claim itself. So what does this mean for how we approach the Bible? What you think and feel about the Bible is intertwined with what you think and feel about God's character and the Bible's relationship to truth.

Discussion Questions:

- How do you feel about the Bible as the ultimate source of spiritual truth?
- How is that connected to your understanding of God's character and posture?

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EVALUATION

How do students know if they are understanding the text? How does the teacher know if they are understanding it?

Suggestion A

Activity: *Have students talk about 2 Timothy 3:16 at their tables. In what ways does this Bible verse reveal our need for the Bible?*

Discussion Question:

- What are the three reasons we discussed for the necessity of Scripture?

Suggestion B

Activity: *Have students talk about God's motivation for giving us the Bible. (love)*

Discussion Question:

- How is God's motivation (love) behind/connected to the three reasons we discussed for the necessity of Scripture?

TRANSITION

Connect the two sections of Main Point 1

Knowing *why* we need to study the Bible and knowing *how* to study the Bible are two different things. Studying the Bible can feel intimidating. It can create insecurity or anxiety. And that's one reason we are glad you're here. Everything is better together. We are all here to learn and stumble, grow, get things right and get things wrong, repent, and to need Jesus together. So let's figure this thing out together. You are not alone. And because you're here, I'm not alone either.

If you've taken a Bible study with us before, I know some of what we just walked through was probably familiar. And some of what we are about to walk through regarding *how* we are going to study using the REAP method will also be familiar. But the structure of this study is a bit different from how we normally approach books of the Bible. So stay with me!

EXPLAIN: Main Point 1-B

Main Point 1-B: God has a purpose in why and HOW we study the Psalms.

God has a purpose in why and how we study the Psalms. In this section we are going to answer the question *How will we study the book of Psalms?* And the answer is: with a lot of help! Help from the Holy Spirit, help from our homework guide, help from those in your table group, and help from our class time. The reality is that we cannot intuit God or His direction or desire for our lives. We need the Bible that He gave us.

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And this is why we begin with the *why*. Knowing that the Bible is God's love letter to us changes how hard we fight to read it, understand it, and live according to it. When you get stuck, go back to these truths. Preach the truth to your heart that God gave you His Word, because He loves you so very much.

OUR POSTURE MATTERS – We study the Bible humbly and thoughtfully, so our posture matters. Have you ever had a conversation with someone who was distracted the whole time, or with someone who didn't let you finish your sentence? Maybe someone who seemed to care more about winning some sort of prize for knowing more or having more opinions? Or someone who only seemed to be talking to you so they could get something from you? Sadly, we often go into our Bible study time with these sorts of postures before God. Psalms 18:31 says, “For who is God, but the LORD?”

Acknowledging that God is God and we are not is the first step in humbling our hearts to receive the help from Him that we so desperately need.

With what kind of posture do we approach the Bible?

- A Posture of Prayer – It is only God who can reveal, explain, and utilize the truth of the Scriptures. We must begin by asking the Lord to help us read, understand, care, and obey.
- A Posture of Humility – Knowing who God is and that it is our Creator speaking to us (Colossians 1:15–20) should make us approach the Word with incredible humility.
- A Posture of Thoughtfulness – Knowing that God's Word is always true and never comes back void (Isaiah 55:11) should make us want to approach it thoughtfully—to understand what it says, what it means, and how we should obey it.
- A Posture of Curiosity – Whether this is your first time reading Psalms or you have read it a hundred times, there is always more for you to learn. Ask the Lord to help you be a curious reader. In Barnabas Piper's book, *The Curious Christian*, he writes about how much curiosity affects our relationship with God. He writes, “We are uncurious—uncurious about the depths of His goodness and the mysteries of His ways. Our uncuriosity settles for flannelgraph depictions of God instead of relentlessly and eagerly seeking to know Him” (page 4). Be curious!

OUR METHOD MATTERS – We study the Bible humbly and thoughtfully, so how we go about studying the Bible matters.

- It is dangerous to “cherry pick” verses or to use a Bible verse out of context.
 - Many have heard the story of the man whose devotional reading consisted of cracking his Bible at random and reading the first verse his finger touched. One morning this was his verse for the day: “And Judas went out and hanged himself.” *That can't be it*, he thought. So he tried again. “Go thou and do likewise” was his second hit. Chagrined, he thought, *The third time's the charm!* It wasn't. It read: “What thou doest, do quickly!” We can laugh at the absurdity of this example, but how many of us do something similar in the way we try to understand and apply Scripture without paying attention to context?
- We adhere to a study method to help us avoid going off-track or misapplying the Bible. Think of it as bowling bumpers. The method we use keeps us focused so we see things we might otherwise miss and from going into the “gutter” and seeing things that aren't there.
- If you've done an inductive Bible study before, you may be familiar with these steps to study: observe, interpret, apply. If you've done a REAP study with us, you may be familiar with *read* (where we make observations of what the text says), *examine* (where we interpret the text for meaning based on what the text says and the context it says it in), and *apply* (asking how the

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text should be applied to our lives to change us), followed by *pray* (speaking these things back to God and processing what He's showing us).

- The reason these methods exist is just to have a thoughtful posture in how we approach the text, so we see things we might otherwise miss, and so we don't see things that aren't there. They help us read Scripture broadly (understanding how it all fits together to make one magnificent story—the magnificent story—and they help us read deeply (seeing that there aren't enough riches in Scripture for us to ever fully exhaust). It really is living and active!
- So we will have you study Psalms on your own with the help of the student workbook that will guide you through these REAP steps each day (for five days of each week). This part is so important! You must personally wrestle with the text and not simply hear from someone else who has.

But this REAP study will be different from the ones we have done in the past in two ways:

- First, the way our class time correlates with the student workbook will be different from other studies we have done in the past. In the past, we've had students study a passage of the text *before* we teach it, so that when you come to class, what you learn and discuss in here adds further to what you have already learned on your own. But for our Psalms study, what you learn in class will introduce you to what you will then study on your own over the next five days.
 - The book of Psalms is divided into five collections or “books,” each with a theme that relates to redemptive history. (We will go over that structure and those themes later on in today’s class.) But for now, just know that we will use our class time to introduce the theme of each section of Psalms that you will then study the following week using your student workbook.
- Second, instead of studying every chapter of the book of Psalms, like we would normally do in studying a book of the Bible, we will have you cover a selection of psalms each week from the specific book within Psalms we are studying. That is mostly because there are 150 chapters, or 150 individual psalms, and that is way too much to cover in only seven weeks of a REAP study.
 - Your homework will lead you through a rich, representative sample of the different types of psalms found within each of the five books (again, we will go over what those types or categories are in just a moment). But what I want you to know right now is that this is intended to give you a broad understanding of the book of Psalms as a whole and set you up to be able to study the rest of the individual psalms on your own once you finish this study.

Suggestions for the teacher:

- *This is a great point to briefly walk through the workbook contents. Make sure students know they have the REAP Overview in the appendix, but students really should have everything they need in their student workbook (and Bibles to read the individual psalms).*
- *It's also a good opportunity to point out that the student workbook may look long or intimidating. Make sure students know that the student workbook is a tool for them to use and not the boss of them. The most important thing students can do is just to be in the Psalms text. That is where the relationship with Jesus is!*
- *It's also a great time to address class structure (teaching, discussion, teaching, discussion) and the role of table leaders, if that hasn't already been covered.*

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God has a purpose in why and how we study the Psalms. When **we study the Bible humbly and thoughtfully**, God uses His Word to renew our minds, stir and shape our affections, and compel us to a life of devotion and obedience. Our posture and our method both contribute to this!

ELABORATE

How can students deepen their understanding and apply it to their lives?

Suggestion A

Tell a personal story about how Scripture has transformed your life.

Discussion Questions:

- Consider the order of REAP (which should technically be called PREAP, because we always begin with prayer).
 - Why do you think the order of this methodology is important?
 - What part of the method is the hardest for you to stay engaged with?
- Spend a few moments praying for one another to have proper posture and method during your Bible study.

Suggestion B

Take a few moments for the students to familiarize themselves with the study guide book.

Discussion Questions:

- What barriers do you come up against when you begin a new Bible study (e.g. making time, caring about it, staying committed, praying, reading, examining, applying, etc.)?
- Spend a few moments praying for one another to have proper posture and method during your Bible study.

EVALUATION

How do students know if they are understanding the text? How does the teacher know if they are understanding it?

Suggestion A

Ask the class this question and have them raise their hands so everyone can see:

Which part of the process of reading the Bible are you tempted to skip?

- Reading slowly with an attention to detail
- Taking the time to ask the hard questions of the text (and your observations) to understand what it means
- Taking the vulnerable step of asking God for help in applying the text to your life in obedience
- Talking to God about all of it in prayer

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Discussion Question:

- Why do you think you are tempted to skip this step?

Suggestion B

Give students a few minutes to write down a personal statement summarizing why they (personally) need and want to study the Bible in this season and how they are committing to do that.

Discussion Activity:

- Ask cohorts to share their personal statements in pairs at their tables.
 - If time allows, ask for a couple people to share their statements with the whole class.

EXPLAIN: Main Point 2

Main Point 2: The Psalms draw us into God's story and give voice to our own.

For the remainder of our time, we are going to get familiar with the book of Psalms. While anyone can come to the book of Psalms and gain a lot of enjoyment and understanding from reading it, the more you understand the way the book is organized, the different categories of psalms, and certain literary elements used within them, the more you will be drawn into God's story and be able to give voice to your own story. **The Psalms draw us into God's story and give voice to our own.**

Instruct the students that they can turn to pages 12–14 in their student workbook and follow along as you touch on these aspects of the book of Psalms. That way they do not need to take extensive notes during this teaching, but rather, can highlight the things that you cover.

STRUCTURE

Note: Each of the five books within Psalms will be covered extensively the week before students complete homework assignments within that book. You only need to give a brief overview in today's lesson.

The book of Psalms has a definite structure that has a chronological element but is unrelated to the timing of when each psalm was written or to the specific subject of that psalm. Instead, the individual psalms have been organized into one book of the Bible containing five smaller books that correspond to God's big story, beginning with creation and ending with re-creation. We do not know who arranged the psalms in their present form. But we can see that the organization tells the grand story, sung in five parts, much like the movements in a symphony. These five parts are called *books*. Each book emphasizes a theme, which is a central idea or truth about life. These themes were relevant when they were written, and they remain relevant today. The five themes are:

- Book 1: Confrontation (Psalms 1–41)
- Book 2: Communication (Psalms 42–72)
- Book 3: Devastation (Psalms 73–89)
- Book 4: Maturation (Psalms 90–106)
- Book 5: Restoration (Psalms 107–150)

- Psalms Five-Book Story Arch: [Note: This story arch (found on page 12 of the student workbook) can be used in the introduction of each week's lesson to ground the students in the

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overall theme of the book of Psalms.] The five books within Psalms also align with Israel's history:

- God promised His people a land and a king. The people received those things through Moses and Joshua, and in David, who *confronts* numerous enemies before sitting on the throne. David reigns for a time and *communicates* an invitation to all nations to know and worship the LORD. David's descendants turn away from God, and so do the people. Eventually, the kingdom of Israel fractures, and the people experience *devastation* through war, famine, and exile. But God is not absent in those events; He remains near, a constant help. As God's people *mature* in their faith through suffering, they look forward to *restoration*, the day when God reigns in glory forevermore.
- Starting with next week's class, each week of our study will cover one of these books within the Psalms. We will take the first half of each class to go more in-depth on the theme of the book you will study in your homework for the following week. Then in the second half of class, we will look at the first psalm from that book and the last psalm from that book—what we call the “bookends” of that collection—and learn how that theme is shown in those psalms.

But before we jump into each of the five books within Psalms, we want you to gain an understanding of the different *categories* of psalms that you will find throughout the collections. That will be the focus of your first week of homework—what you will be studying when you leave here today.

CATEGORIES OF PSALMS

[Note: The student homework for this week will have the students REAPing through each of these five categories of psalms. Students will be served well if you spend a good portion of time here.]

This week in your homework, you will look at different categories of psalms. Categories highlight common characteristics and follow rules and conventions, which form expectations. An opening strum of Garth Brooks' guitar tells us something about what to expect, the same as the initial chords of a Beethoven symphony. The same thing happens when we recognize a psalm as a hymn or wisdom song. We know a *hymn* will encourage us to praise God, while a *wisdom* song will instruct us in the way of integrity.

- Knowing the categories also helps us more meaningfully engage with the texts within their contexts. Context, says professor and theologian Mark D. Futato, “determines meaning. The same words in different contexts can have completely different meanings.” Our reading, examinations, applications, and prayers will be all the richer for taking time to identify a psalm’s category, the conventions it follows or departs from, and its context.
- In your homework for next week you will get to REAP through examples of each of these five categories of psalms:
 - Hymn & Thanksgiving
 - Hymns are praise songs. They typically address God as Creator and/or God as Redeemer, praising Him for His beautiful and well-ordered creation or redemptive acts in history, such as freeing His people from Egypt.
 - Thanksgiving psalms are like hymns, but from a personal slant. David thanks God all the time for how God saves him from his enemies. These psalms rejoice in the God who hears and saves, who bends down from heaven to deliver.
 - Lament & Confession

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- Laments give us permission and show us how to let the tears flow in times of pain and suffering. These are the psalms for the dark nights, the times when it seems the sun has forgotten how to shine.
- Confessional psalms often highlight God's holiness in contrast to the psalmist's sinfulness. They begin with recognizing God's holiness, move to a confession of sin and a plea for healing, support, or deliverance, and conclude with a recommitment to God and His way.
- Royal & Messianic
 - Royal psalms concern God's divine reign. These psalms emphasize God's kingship, God's superiority to other gods, God's care for all creation and all nations, and God's works of creation, redemption, and judgment.
 - Messianic psalms look forward to the promise of God's judgment, which will be enacted and accomplished through His Anointed One. This category of psalms includes the ones spoken by Jesus, along with the ones fulfilled by His life, death, and resurrection.
- Imprecatory
 - These are similar to laments, but they tend to focus on the absence of God's justice in the here and now. These psalms are the cries of the bereft and abandoned, the poor, widow, and orphan. They are the psalms and songs of a people asking, "How long, LORD? When will You return and execute justice? When will You make things right?"
- Wisdom
 - Wisdom psalms instruct. They teach us how to follow God's law, to become the trees planted by living waters described in Psalm 1. Other wisdom psalms explore the fear of the LORD, which is the beginning of wisdom. This category perhaps is a vague one, but any psalm devoted to the question, "What is the good life, and how do I take hold of and keep holding onto it?" likely is a wisdom psalm.

POETIC ELEMENT IN HEBREW POETRY

[Note: A lot of these elements will be included in the Study Tools sections of the first week of homework. All of them will be covered over the course of the seven weeks of homework. Do not feel like you need to talk about each of these this week. Rather simply point to page 14 in the workbook as a list of poetic elements that students can refer to throughout the study, and touch on just a few that might be unfamiliar or interesting. Suggested elements to cover are: doxology, parallelism, and compression.]

Psalms is Hebrew poetry translated into English. Hebrew poetry does not rely on rhyme, meter, or alliteration—the tools of the poetic trade in English poetry. Rather, it draws on certain poetic elements. Your homework is designed to help you learn each of these elements as it points out examples in different psalms.

- Lines – groups of words that take up one line, or row, in a poem.
- Stanzas – groupings of lines set apart by extra space, comparable to a paragraph in prose.
- Refrain – repeated words, lines, or stanzas at regular intervals, often to establish a cadence.
- Inclusio – sometimes called a bookend or sandwich. It opens and closes a unit of thought, acting like a frame for what occurs in between.

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- Acrostic – each stanza or line begins with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, starting with aleph and concluding with taw.
- Doxology – a short hymn of praise to God. Each of Psalms' five books end with a doxology, with the fifth book's doxology spanning the final five psalms. These short hymns not only support Psalms' overall structure but also serve a functional role in the books where they appear. The doxologies stand at the books' seams, moving the reader from one book to another.
- Parallelism – “the single most common characteristic of Hebrew poetry.”¹ It is the restating of a phrase using related meaning or terms which carries forward the thought from the first phrase to the second. It is not simply repetition, but is meant to enhance understanding. As N.T. Wright illustrates:

“The important point here is that some of the most important things we want to say remain just a little beyond even our best words. The first sentence [or phrase] is a signpost to the deep reality; the second, a signpost from a slightly different place. The reader is invited to follow both and to see the larger, unspoken truth looming up behind.”

There are three types of parallelism appearing in Psalms:

- Synonymous: the second line restates the first

*The Lord is my light and my salvation — whom should I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life — whom should I dread? (Psalm 27:1)*
 - Antithetical: the second line restates the first from the opposite direction

*When evildoers came against me to devour my flesh,
my foes and my enemies stumbled and fell. (Psalm 27:2)*
 - Synthetic: the second line heightens the first

*The water saw you, God.
The water saw you; it trembled. (Psalm 77:16a)*
- Chiasmus – the first and last elements correspond to one another, as do the second and second-to-last, working toward the central hinge. That hinge, or central turning point, often recalls the beginning and points to the end.
 - Imagery – figurative language that represents one thing by another thing. Four examples are:
 - Allusion: referring to something—usually historical or cultural—outside the sphere of a poem
 - Personification: giving “a physical characteristic or innate quality of animation to something that is inanimate” or abstract
 - Simile: a comparison using “like” or “as”
 - Metaphor: a comparison without using “like” or “as”
 - Compression – the art of selectivity. Poetry’s language is like a vintage wine. The poet stomps around, squishing all the grapes, straining for what is essential and removing anything that is not. What the reader or hearer receives is the aged wine. It has been measured; it has been compressed; it has been prepared; it is ready to be seen and tasted.

¹ Longman, T. III. *How to Read the Psalms* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 93.

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ELABORATE

How can students deepen their understanding and apply it to their lives?

Suggestion A

One thing that the redemptive story of all creation and the historical story of Israel in the Bible have in common is that they both move from lamentation to praise. From the numerous enemy confrontations and ultimate devastation of exile to Israel's return to the Promised Land and ultimate arrival of their long awaited messianic King, from the fall of humanity and the sufferings of this life to our future restoration when Jesus returns, history is moving from lamentation to praise. The same is true of the book of Psalms.

Mark Futato notes in his book, *Transformed by Praise: The Purpose and Message of the Psalms*, "Although laments are spread throughout the book of Psalms, the laments are piled up at the beginning of the book. ... It is clear that at least in a general way the psalms have been arranged in a purposeful order. There is movement from the beginning of the book to the end, a movement from songs of lamentation to songs of praise, from the chords of suffering to the chorus of glory."

He points out that we move from lines like these at the start:

O LORD, how many are my foes! (Ps 3:1)

How long , O LORD? Will you forget me forever? (Ps 13:1)

to lines like these toward the end:

Praise be to the LORD, my Rock (Ps 144:1)

I will exalt you, my God the King (Ps 145:1)

Individual laments within the book of Psalms also follow this pattern of moving from lamentation to praise (with only one exception: Ps 88). In his book, Futato points out that this movement "from lamentation to praise, from suffering to glory is a portrait of the life of Christ."

He also says, "After his resurrection from the dead, Jesus met two men on the road to Emmaus. Since they had put all of their hope in Jesus and they thought that Jesus was dead, they were in despair. Jesus told them that if they had only understood the Old Testament, they would have known that he was first to suffer and then to enter his glory (Luke 24:25). Suffering to glory, lamentation to praise is a description of Jesus' life."²

Jesus moved from the cross to resurrection from the dead. He has experienced every kind of suffering imaginable and is now seated in glory at the right hand of the Father. As your High Priest, He is able to understand you in your suffering and to comfort you with a heart full of compassion and love. And as your Messianic King, He is able to redeem your life and resurrect you from the dead to be with Him for all eternity.

Discussion Question:

Many of us go to psalms of lament when we are suffering or hurting, because they seem to give voice to our pain.

- When reading psalms of lament, do you tend to focus more on the lines related to suffering or the ones related to praise? Why?

² Mark D. Futato, *Transformed by Praise: The Purpose and Message of the Psalm*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 11–22.

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- How can picturing Jesus' life as a movement from lamentation to praise help with your understanding and application of these psalms?

Suggestion B

A doxology is a short hymn of praise to God. As mentioned before, each of the five books within Psalms ends with a doxology. These stand at the books' seams, moving the reader from one book to another.

But the doxologies also serve as a brace, providing emotional support in places where a psalm's subject matter leaves us particularly vulnerable to doubt and despair. Psalm 89 starts off as a hymn of praise remembering God's covenant faithfulness to His people in the past, but eventually turns to one of the darkest psalms, as it laments God's apparent absence in the present. Yet the psalmist will not end things there. Even as he cries out, "Lord, where are the former acts of your faithful love, that you swore to David in your faithfulness?" (Ps 89:49) he still closes with this short, bracing doxology.

"Blessed be the LORD forever.

Amen and amen." (Ps 89:52)

He believes that the Lord will keep the covenant with David, whatever the evidence to the contrary. The doxology helps hold God's goodness and the psalmist's pain together.

Discussion Question:

- When you think of some of the things going on in our world, what truths about God can help serve as a brace of emotional support to combat feelings of doubt and despair? As a table, work together to list out some of your concerns and a truth about God that can offer encouragement in the face of that concern.
- If you have time, try to write a doxology using some of those truths.

EVALUATION

How do students know if they are understanding the text? How does the teacher know if they are understanding it?

Suggestion A

What are some of the categories of psalms we will see in this book? Let's see how many you remember.

[Answer: Hymn & Thanksgiving, Lament & Confession, Royal & Messianic, Imprecatory, Wisdom]

Suggestion B

Who can name the summary words for the five books organized within the book of Psalms?

[Answer: Confrontation, Communication, Devastation, Maturation, Restoration]

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CONCLUSION

Suggestions to wrap up and reinforce Lesson Thesis and Main Points 1 and 2

What do students need to walk away with? What do they need to know to dig into next week's text?

Restate the Lesson Thesis: The Psalms draw us into God's story and give voice to our own. Then, give students a glimpse of what will be covered next week. Mention their homework, and ensure there are no questions.

Pray to close the class.

Student Workbook Snapshot for the Following Week

Day	Text	Tools Taught
Introduction	Intro to the Book of Psalms, Overview of Five Books, Categories, Poetic Elements	
Day 1	Psalm 34 – Hymn & Thanksgiving	Superscription, Lines, Stanzas, Parallelism, Chiasmus
Day 2	Psalm 44 – Lament & Confession	Theme, Tone
Day 3	Psalm 109 – Imprecatory	Conjunctions, Prepositions, Metaphor, Simile
Day 4	Psalm 146 – Royal & Messianic	Verb Tenses
Day 5	Psalm 15 – Wisdom	Bible Translations
Day 6	Challenge: Traveling Songs	

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Lesson 2: Book 1

Lesson 2 Thesis

Psalms Thesis: The Psalms draw us into God's story and give voice to our own.

Lesson 2 Thesis: The Lord reigns from eternity to eternity.

Thesis Summary: The first movement is Book 1, composed of Psalms 1–41, and here we see the story open with CONFRONTATION. Through miraculous circumstances and over centuries, God fulfilled His covenant promises to Abraham, proving that **the Lord reigns from eternity to eternity**. The people received the land and a king through Moses and Joshua, and in David, who confronts numerous enemies before sitting on the throne as God's representative ruler. But *the Lord's reign entails confrontation for humanity*. David is confronted with many enemies who are opposed to God's righteous kingdom. Yet the Lord is always faithful! When His people turn from wickedness and choose to trust Him, *the Lord protects the righteous on their path*.

Lesson 2 Outline Guide

INTRODUCTION

Teaching Tip: Do a quick recap of the Psalms five-book story arch students learned last week and remind them of the overall thesis of the book of Psalms. Invite the class into this process (ask for help retelling the story and connecting it to the overall thesis) in order to help with overall retention.

Lesson ENGAGE: Introduction and Hook Suggestions (include Lesson Thesis)

How will students be drawn in and understand why the main points are important?

Suggestion A

How many of you here grew up believing in Santa? Me, too.

- *Give a personal account of your childhood experience waking up early, anxious to see what Santa brought, meeting Santa at a mall, writing him letters, etc.*

But when you grow up believing in Santa, there comes a day when everything changes.

- *Share how you found out that Santa wasn't real.*

Growing up believing in Santa can be magical, and for many of us, it was. But then there came that day when we were all confronted with reality—that Santa is really our parents. Now, not everyone grows up believing in Santa. Not everyone experiences *this* confrontation with reality. But there is one confrontation that is true for all people. **The Lord reigns from eternity to eternity.** That reality is true for all people, in all places, in all times. And just as I was not pleased with the reality that Santa wasn't

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real, some people are not pleased with the reality that the Lord *is*.

Suggestion B

Is anyone here a fan of fantasy books or movies? Any *Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter* fans in the room? Fantasy is one of those genres that people tend to take sides on—fully in or fully out. And one of the reasons some people dislike fantasy is that there's too much magic, or too many weird creatures, or unpronounceable names, made-up places, dragons, trolls—all kinds of fantastical stuff! J.R.R. Tolkien, author of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of Rings* trilogy said that those are exactly the reasons we all *need* these kinds of stories in our lives. In his essay *On Fairy-Stories*, Tolkien—who was a Christian himself—calls using our imaginations in this way a “natural human activity.”

In his essay, he responds to critics of fantasy-reading like this: “Why should a man be scorned, if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison-walls? The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it.” Considering that Philippians 3:20 tells us that we are exiles here because heaven is our home, this argument seems pretty compelling.

But there's an even more compelling argument for fantasy stories in this essay, and in it, Tolkien coins a new term—“eucatastrophe” [pronounced: *yoo-catastrophe*]—which means a joyous catastrophe, or a happy ending. Tolkien argues:

The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. The story begins and ends in joy. It has pre-eminently the “inner consistency of reality.” There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many sceptical men have accepted as true on its own merits. ... To reject it leads either to sadness or to wrath.

Listen again to those responses to the eucatastrophe of the birth and death of Jesus: “There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many sceptical men have accepted as true on its own merits. ... To reject it leads either to sadness or to wrath.” When confronted with the reality of Jesus, Tolkien says the responses are either “true” or “sadness or ... wrath.” Book 1 of the book of Psalms speaks to this same confrontation. The truth that all people are confronted with is that **the Lord reigns from eternity to eternity**. And Tolkien is mostly right, as we'll see in the Psalms. When confronted with this reality, we can either believe it is true and see our good Father for who He is, or we can reject it and see our just Father for who He is.

Lesson EXPLORE: Activity and/or Discussion Suggestions

How can students wrestle with the topic before it is taught?

Suggestion A

(Connects to *ENGAGE* option A) We've all had that moment where our entire reality has shifted when a truth was introduced. Maybe it was the truth about Santa. Maybe it was a diagnosis or medical news. Maybe it was a revealing confession from a friend or family member.

Discussion Questions:

- Briefly describe when your reality shifted when a truth was introduced.

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- How did you respond initially? Did your response change over time?
- Would anything have been different if you'd had the opposite response to this truth?

[Note: This can also be a quick-write activity! Provide students with half-sheets of blank paper and pens. Read the following instructions, and use the discussion questions above as the writing prompt.]

- You will spend the next two minutes writing. Write down whatever comes to mind. It doesn't need to make sense or be pretty. It is for your eyes only. (Read discussion questions.)

Wrap up and transition to EXPLAIN:

I imagine that many of your responses to a shift in reality involved some sort of conflict. Maybe it was a conflict within yourself. Maybe it was a conflict with the person who told you the truth. [Point back to the conflict in your personal story above.] Conflict also arises when humanity is confronted with the reality that **the Lord reigns from eternity to eternity**. And that is the main theme we will see in Book 1 of Psalms. **The Lord's reign entails confrontation for humanity.**

Suggestion B

Provide students with half-sheets of blank paper and pens. Give the following instructions:

- For the next 60 seconds, draw a picture of whatever comes to mind when I say the word "reality."

After 60 seconds, tell students to stop and turn their papers over. Give the following instructions:

- For the next 60 seconds, draw a picture of what it looks like to reject the reality that you drew on the opposite side of the paper.

Wrap up and transition to Explain:

When we reject reality, we stand in opposition to truth. That sort of rejection is bound to produce conflict with anyone and anything on the other side. That is especially true when humanity is confronted with the ultimate reality that **the LORD reigns from eternity to eternity**. And that is the main theme we will see in Book 1 of Psalms. **The Lord's reign entails confrontation for humanity.**

EXPLAIN: Main Point 1

Book 1 Theme: Confrontation

Main Point 1: The Lord's reign entails confrontation for humanity.

OBSERVATIONS and INTERPRETATIONS to support Main Point 1 from the text

What do students need to see and understand from the text?

Though there are multiple themes in Book 1, the main theme is *confrontation*.

- A confrontation is “a clashing of forces or ideas,” or a “conflict” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).
- Book 1 isn’t necessarily about battles or clashes, but rather, about a confrontation with reality.

The Lord's reign entails confrontation for humanity.

- The reality is that **the Lord reigns from eternity to eternity**. That’s the truth. But from the earliest days of creation, many have been opposed to this reality. Think about it—what did the serpent say to Eve? The serpent questioned the reigning King. “Did God *really* say...?”

Psalms

The Lord's reign entails confrontation for humanity. This plays out in one of two ways. We can accept this reality, embracing God as our Creator-King. Or we can reject this reality, and in doing so, reject God and His Kingship.

- In his book *Psalms: Volume I*, author James Hamilton Jr. describes this rejection this way:
They [God's enemies] do not take Yahweh as their God, believe what Yahweh has said, follow Yahweh's instructions, trust Yahweh's character, or submit to Yahweh's king. Whether they worship themselves, idols, or something else, they do not love God or his people. This puts them in constant conflict with God, his purposes, and his people. (p. 74)
- Those who reject the Lord's reign are referred to as His "enemies."
 - 30 of the 41 psalms in Book 1 refer to these enemies.
 - God's enemies don't just oppose God, but they also oppose God's people. And we see the author of the psalms within Book 1 deal with this opposition.
- This confrontation sets up two paths for humanity, and we'll see them over and over again in the book of Psalms: we can walk the way of the righteous or the way of the wicked.

Only one author is named in Book 1: David. He wrote Psalms 3–41. And with a theme like confrontation, you might expect to read lots of negative emotions in David's writing, like anger or sadness. But as you'll read in your student workbook, "David may express rage now and again, but he does so within the context of God's promises, which are altogether true and trustworthy. Even when David encounters enemies, he sings. He raises a triumphal shout, for God exists, and God reigns."

ELABORATE

How can students deepen their understanding and apply it to their lives?

Suggestion A

Rejecting God can be an uncomfortable thing to talk about. When we think about our friends and family members who don't have a relationship with God, sometimes it's hard to think about them as having *rejected* Him, as it's easier to think about them just *not knowing* Him yet. But **the Lord's reign entails confrontation for humanity.** And all of humanity must respond.

Psalm 35 gives us some food for thought when it comes to the struggle of understanding those who reject God as our "enemies." In verses 4–6, David says this:

- ⁴ Let those who intend to take my life
be disgraced and humiliated;
let those who plan to harm me
be turned back and ashamed.
- ⁵ Let them be like chaff in the wind,
with the angel of the Lord driving them away.
- ⁶ Let their way be dark and slippery,
with the angel of the Lord pursuing them.

Psalm 35 is an imprecatory psalm, which you may remember from your homework is a category of psalm that focuses on the absence of God's justice, and sometimes very directly on the divine curses the author wishes on his enemies. These words might seem harsh or absent of the love we're

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commanded to have for our enemies in the New Testament. However, careful study of this psalm can offer further insight. Psalm 35:12–13 says:

- ¹² They repay me evil for good ...
- ¹³ ... when they were sick,
my clothing was sackcloth;
I humbled myself with fasting,
and my prayer was genuine.

It appears here that David made a concerted effort to first love this enemy. It appears this love was rejected.

Here are two more things to remember as we struggle to understand these “enemies”:

1. Have you ever heard the saying, “Hate the sin, but love the sinner”? It’s not a perfect saying, but the idea behind it is sound. We can be morally against someone’s rejection of God and still love and respect that person.
2. We don’t have to shy away when the psalmists’ words start to feel harsh or unloving. We know that everything in the Bible is inspired by God and profitable for us. We also see both Jesus and Paul quote from Psalm 69, another imprecatory psalm. If Jesus and Paul didn’t avoid these words, then we can definitely find something of value in them for us, no matter how uncomfortable we may feel on first reading them.

Discuss and Pray:

- At your table, get in groups of two. Share the name of an enemy of God (a nonbeliever) whom you love dearly (like a family member or friend). Then share the name of someone you see as an enemy or someone who has hurt you who is also an enemy of God. Pray together for God to save both of those people and that they would both accept that **the Lord reigns from eternity to eternity**.
 - When you are done, have the other partner share and then pray for salvation for those two people.

Suggestion B

Do you have someone in your life you’d describe as conflict-avoidant? Someone who shies away (or even runs away) from conflict—avoiding it at all costs? The person who popped into your head might even be yourself—no need to raise your hands! We won’t use you and your life as an example for today’s lesson. There are plenty of conflict-avoidant characters in shows and movies that we can point to.

- *Share 1–2 examples of conflict-avoidant characters from shows or movies you love. An example from The Office is provided as a template (which you may certainly use if you’re an Office fan!). End your example(s) with how avoiding reality/conflict made the situation worse.*
 - I always think of Michael Scott—boy, does he hate conflict! Do you remember in the episode “Conflict Resolution” where the “best” option according to him was actually for Oscar to wear a t-shirt of the baby musician poster he hated so that Angela could see it whenever she wanted? Michael called it a “Win-win-win!” Not choosing a clear side was way worse—for everyone involved!

Psalms

Just the idea of confrontation sends some people—both real and fictional—running for hills. But that doesn't really work for the confrontation we're discussing today, does it? **The Lord's reign entails confrontation for humanity.** There's no running away from this—right? Can you just *not* choose? No. Because not choosing is in and of itself a choice. We can accept the Lord's reign, and enter into His kingdom, rest in His promises, hold fast to His truth. Or we reject His reign, and because **the Lord reigns from eternity to eternity**, the consequences of that rejection are eternal. And not choosing is, ultimately, an eternal choice.

Discussion Question:

- When in life do you avoid, struggle to fully embrace, or push back against the Lord's eternal reign? What truths are you forgetting or struggling to remember in those times?

EVALUATION

How do students know if they are understanding the text? How does the teacher know if they are understanding it?

Suggestion A

Think-Pair-Share:

1. Think: Try to remember the confrontation that Psalms Book 1 sets up.
2. Pair: Turn to your neighbor and explain the confrontation that Psalms Book 1 sets up in your own words.
3. Share: [Call on a couple of students and have them share their answers.]

Discussion Question(s):

- Describe how knowing that **the Lord reigns from eternity to eternity** and that **the Lord's reign entails confrontation for humanity** impacts your relationships with your neighbors, coworkers, and unbelieving friends. How does it impact missions?

Suggestion B

(Connects with EXPLORE option B) Take a look at the drawings that you made earlier before really diving into the major theme in Book 1 of confrontation. Grab a new sheet of paper from the center of your table, and on one side of the paper, and based on what you just learned about confrontation draw a picture that reflects the Main Point 1: **The Lord's reign entails confrontation for humanity.**

Table Group Discussion:

- Share your new drawing with your table group, and describe how it reflects how **the Lord's reign entails confrontation for humanity.**

Psalms

TRANSITION: Connect Main Point 1 discussion to introduction of Main Point 2.

Each week of our study of the book of Psalms, we will spend the first half of the lesson learning about the major theme present in that book, and then we will look at how that theme is reflected in the bookend psalms—the first and the last psalm of that book. For Book 1, these psalms are Psalm 1 and Psalm 41. The theme for this book is that **the Lord reigns from eternity to eternity** and this **reign entails a confrontation for humanity**. We learned about how the reality of God's reign sets out two paths, and we'll now see in Psalms 1 and 41 that **the Lord protects the righteous on their path**.
(Repeat) The Lord protects the righteous on their path.

EXPLAIN: Main Point 2

TEXT: Psalm 1, Psalm 41

Main Point 2: The Lord protects the righteous on their path.

OBSERVATIONS and INTERPRETATIONS to support Main Point 2 from the text

What do students need to see and understand from the text?

We can see this throughout Psalm 1, but we see it explicitly in verse 6: “For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous / but the way of the wicked leads to ruin.”

- There are two paths, two ways: the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked.
- We see the Lord watching over one. We see the result the other way: ruin. **The Lord protects the righteous on their path.**

We learned about the primary theme of Book 1 earlier—the idea of confrontation. But there are two other themes to be aware of as we read through Book 1.

1. The Law — God’s law, His Word, appears throughout this book.
 - In Psalm 19, which you’ll study in your Day 3 homework, you’ll read that His Word is “more desirable than gold — / than an abundance of pure gold” (19:10). Why? Because **the Lord protects the righteous on their path**, and one of the ways He does this is through the gift of His Word. His Word shows us how to draw near to Him.
 - God’s Word also shows us that sin leads to death and that we’re not able to draw near to God on our own, as we see in Romans 7:7–14 (*read passage aloud*). And we’re so grateful for this clarity that God’s Word brings us, because it shows us our need for a Savior! Which leads us to our next theme...
2. The Messiah — Jesus Christ! Our Redeemer and Savior!
 - And these two themes—God’s law and His Messiah—function together in the book of Psalms, as a psalm about the Messiah will often appear next to (either before or after) a psalm about God’s Word.
 - In fact, you can see it twice in Book 1: Psalms 1 and 2, and then in Psalms 18 and 19.
 - And though these are separate, though related and interconnected themes in the book of Psalms, they come together as one in the person of Jesus! (See *Student Workbook for more on this*.)

Psalms

Note: We highly recommend going straight into ELABORATE option A at this point in your lesson.

ELABORATE

How can students deepen their understanding and apply it to their lives?

Suggestion A

Have students read Psalm 1 and Psalm 41 in their table groups (in their Bibles, on Bible apps, or you may provide printouts) and make observations based on the themes they just learned about.

- *Make sure students understand they will likely only find 1 (sometimes 2) of the themes in each psalm.*
- *Consider printing out the following observation questions or displaying them on the screen as groups read and make observations.*
- *If time allows, when tables are done with their observations, call on various tables to share some of their findings with the large group.*

Observation Questions:

- Look for evidence of confrontation (**The Lord reigns from eternity to eternity**). This might look like enemies of the Lord or the author's enemies, or it could describe two paths/ways.
 - What does the text say about these enemies or these paths/ways?
- Look for evidence of the Law (His law, God's Word).
 - What does the text say about His law? How does it affect the psalm's author?
- Look for evidence of the Messiah.
 - How is He described? How else does the author speak of Him?
- Observe how the following is evidenced in each psalm: **The Lord protects the righteous on their path.**
 - Compare/contrast how this is evident in both psalms.

Suggestion B

*Share a personal story that illustrates how **the Lord protects the righteous on their path**. Be sure to emphasize two different paths/ways, God's Word, and your need for a Savior, where applicable.*

Discussion Question:

- How have you seen evidence that **the Lord protects the righteous on their path** in your own life?

Psalms

EVALUATION

How do students know if they are understanding the text? How does the teacher know if they are understanding it?

Suggestion A

Ask the large group: Who can name the major theme and the other two themes of Psalms Book 1?
[Answer: Confrontation, The Law, The Messiah]

Suggestion B

(Connects with EXPLORE option B and Main Point 1 EVALUATION option B) Take out your second drawing—the one where you illustrated confrontation. Does it reflect the truth we learned that **the Lord protects the righteous on their path?** If not, add to or revise it to reflect this truth.

Discussion Question:

- Did you need to add to or revise your drawing? If so, share what you added, and if not, share how your original drawing already reflected this truth.

CONCLUSION

Suggestions to wrap up and reinforce Lesson Thesis and Main Points 1 and 2

What do students need to walk away with? What do they need to know to dig into next week's text?

Let's make sure we're all ready to sit down this week and study some of the psalms in Book 1. We learned today that the major theme of Book 1 is **the Lord reigns from eternity to eternity.** This reality introduces some conflict, as **the Lord's reign entails confrontation for humanity.** We accept and embrace our King and walk the way of the righteous, or we reject our King and walk the way of the wicked. Psalms 1 and 41—the bookends of Book 1—reveal that **the Lord protects the way of the righteous.**

Your homework for this week is Week 2 Homework. As you study this week, remember that your Student Workbook is an amazing resource. Pages 37–38 give information about the themes in Book 1 that we covered today. Pages 39–40 will help you get really nerdy in your studying and show you the structure of this book. It would be helpful to at least understand where each psalm you read this week fits into the structure of Book 1.

I want to draw special attention to page 59, where you can find your Weekly Challenge for this week. Last week, you were challenged to create a playlist of your own traveling songs. This week, you are challenged to memorize Scripture. Psalm 1 is only six verses long! Give it a try. There are great tips on page 59 to help you in this process. Text your table group this week and share how you're doing in this process. Maybe challenge each other to recite your passage when we meet next week—it's totally up to you!

More than anything this week—more than trying to identify themes or complete your homework or memorize Scripture—sit in God's Word. Soak up God's Word. Be like the one described in Psalm 1 whose "... delight is in the Lord's instruction / and he meditates on it day and night. / He is like a tree

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planted beside flowing streams / that bears its fruit in its season / and its leaf does not wither. / Whatever he does prospers.”

Pray to close the class.

Student Workbook Snapshot for the Following Week

Day	Text	Tools Taught
Introduction	Themes: Confrontation, The Law, The Messiah	
Day 1	Psalm 2	Context
Day 2	Psalm 6	Parallelism
Day 3	Psalm 19	Personification
Day 4	Psalm 29	Dictionaries
Day 5	Psalm 37	
Day 6	Challenge: Scripture Memorization	

Psalms

Lesson 3: Book 2

Lesson 3 Thesis

Psalms Thesis: The Psalms draw us into God's story and give voice to our own.

Lesson 3 Thesis: God desires and invites all people to know Him.

Thesis Summary: The second movement is Book 2, composed of Psalms 42–72, and the theme of COMMUNICATION is brought forward here. God's righteous rule is not only for the people of Israel; **God desires and invites all people to know Him.** This is the essence of what it means to be blessed—the transformative experience of knowing God as the giver. In this way, *God blesses through communication*. His blessed people become heralds of this blessed gift to ourselves, to others, and even back to Him as we acknowledge who He is and what He has done. *God's people know, remember, and share His blessings.*

Lesson 3 Outline Guide

INTRODUCTION

Teaching Tip: Do a quick recap of the Psalms five-book story arch students learned last week and remind them of the overall thesis of the book of Psalms. Invite the class into this process (ask for help retelling the story and connecting it to the overall thesis) in order to help with overall retention.

Lesson ENGAGE: Introduction and Hook Suggestions (include Lesson Thesis)

How will students be drawn in and understand why the main points are important?

Suggestion A

How pivotal is communication in our everyday lives? Several research studies suggest that the average person speaks anywhere from 5,000 to 7,000 words a day. Communication is the lifeblood of our daily lives—it's how we build and maintain relationships, how we get things done at work, how kids are taught at school, how we express ourselves and let people know our wants, needs, desires, opinions and beliefs. But communication is also so much more than our words. A generally accepted rule of thumb is that only 7% of communication is in the words we use. Albert Mehrabian, a researcher of body language, found that about 55% of communication is nonverbal and another 38% is conveyed through tone. This begs the question—why did God design us this way? Why did He, quite literally, arrange for our entire beings to be involved in communication?

[Draw the connection for students.] We were meant to glorify God in all that we are—in the words we say, the inflection we use, and how we physically hold ourselves. God uses every facet of our communication to proclaim His glory, because **God desires and invites all people to know Him.** We are creatures of communication. That is because we have a Creator who first communicated to us

Psalms

about Himself, for His glory.

Suggestion B

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you couldn't communicate? Maybe you got a cold or cedar fever and lost your voice. Maybe you found yourself in a conversation with someone who speaks a different language than you. Maybe you had no trouble speaking, but you were talking to someone who just didn't understand what you were saying. Whatever the situation, when we humans are unable to communicate with one another or the world around us, it is an exceedingly frustrating experience, because God designed His creation—especially His image bearers—to operate through communication.

The chief end of man is to glorify God, and one of the main ways we do that is by communicating that glory. What we're going to see in this second book of the Psalms is that **God desires and invites all people to know Him**, and He uses communication—both His communication and ours—to see that desire and invitation through.

Lesson EXPLORE: Activity and/or Discussion Suggestions

How can students wrestle with the topic before it is taught?

Suggestion A

(Have students talk through the Scripture Memorization from this week's Weekly Challenge with their table groups.) Reflect on the week. What happened as a result of listening to, writing out, and memorizing God's Word?

- Did you learn anything new about God through this exercise?
- Did you learn anything new about yourself in light of His Word?
- Did you want to tell people about what you were doing?

*Call everyone back together and ask for a few volunteers from the whole class to recite either Psalm 1 or Psalm 19:7–11. If you choose Psalm 1, ask for 2–3 volunteers from different tables to help each other out. Once they've finished, encourage the volunteers and ask them how it felt to publicly pronounce the Word of God to others. Use their answers to transition to Main Point 1: **God blesses through communication.***

Suggestion B

Pose the following question:

- What is your immediate reaction when you hear that God both desires and invites all people to know Him? How does that resonate in your heart? Do you resonate with this idea, or does it bring up doubts for you?

Have students take a few moments on their own to consider these ideas, both the desire and invitation of God, and what students believe about them. If time allows, have them spend 3–5 minutes in discussion at their tables about their thoughts.

*Wrap up and transition to EXPLAIN: One of the things that can help us believe that **God desires and invites all people to know Him** is to understand one of His purposes in giving us the gift of*

Psalms

communication: it is to bless us. And that is the main theme we will see in Book 2 of Psalms: **God blesses through communication.**

EXPLAIN: Main Point 1

Book 2 Theme: Communication

Main Point 1: God blesses through communication.

OBSERVATIONS and INTERPRETATIONS to support Main Point 1 from the text

What do students need to see and understand from the text?

Throughout Book 2, the main theme we will see is communication. Specifically, there are three main ways by which God blesses through communication:

1. *Communication with Him* – to bless us by knowing Him (Psalm 67:1)
 - God has been good to give us His Word, which communicates to us about Him and all that He has done for His people and His creation.
 - Much of the Psalms are written as prayers to God. Whether expressing joy, fear, frustration, anger, confusion, etc., the psalmists spend a lot of time interacting with and speaking to God. (It is often called “the prayer book” of the Bible, after all!) Prayer is an essential part of communication with God, because it allows us to commune with Him on a personal level.
2. *Communication with others* – to bless them by introducing them to Him (Psalm 67:2)
 - Book 2 has more references to “nations” and “peoples” than almost any other place in the Psalms.
 - Communication is never meant to be static. By definition, communication is supposed to be shared. God shared the truth about Himself with us so that we can then believe it and share it with others. It is not meant to be hoarded. Communication is the means by which God brings people to know Him (Romans 10:14).
3. *Communication with ourselves* – to bless us by rightly knowing ourselves and knowing Him more (Psalm 42:5–6)
 - The psalmists align their lives and words with God’s desire. Through repetition, word choice, description, and other means, the psalmists declare that God is good and wants all people to be truly happy, which comes from knowing God (blessing!) and delighting in His ways.
 - This is essentially the internal dialogue we have in our relationship with God. It’s how we think about Him and meditate on His Word. It’s what we remind ourselves to be true about Him. And it impacts how we can rightly communicate about Him to others.

It will be important to define for students what *blessing* is. The definition of blessing is “knowing God.”

- American theologian Ellen F. Davis says it this way, “Blessing is essentially the transformative experience of knowing and honoring God as the Giver; it means valuing the steady flow that sustains the world even above the gift of life that each of us receives and is in time constrained to relinquish.”
- God communicates blessing. That is, He communicates truth that allows us to know Him—all the time—and we have to learn how to communicate that blessing to ourselves and to others.

Psalms

Communication is the lynchpin and common thread throughout our life of faith—receiving from Him, sharing what He gives, and repeating/remembering what we know of Him.

It may be helpful to define *communication* as more than just speaking, especially with respect to communication with others. It is not just our words, but our actions, choices, lifestyles and daily rhythms that communicate what we believe and how we practically apply that belief every day.

ELABORATE

How can students deepen their understanding and apply it to their lives?

Suggestion A

Share a personal story of someone communicating the truth about God to you.

- *Example:* When my husband and I were walking through a period of infertility in our marriage, it became clear that this was likely a permanent part of our story, not just a season. We were grief-stricken, confused, and angry, among other things. One of the most profound parts of that time in my life was a dear friend who would always be there to mourn with me and comfort me. Her main way of comforting me was pointing me to Jesus, reminding me when I was unable to remind myself that God is good, that He is my ultimate Comforter, and that everything I need is in Him. She encouraged me to take my grief and true feelings to Him so that I could truly start to heal by His power in the knowledge of the gospel. By communicating the truth about God in a way that lovingly pointed me toward Jesus, she helped me be able to take my sorrow to God and communicate with Him. Now, God uses that part of my story to allow me to communicate His goodness and faithfulness to others.

Discussion Questions:

- Think of a time in your life where either someone communicated the truth about God to you or you were able to communicate that truth to someone else. What sort of impact did that have on you? Have you used that as part of your story that you communicate to others?

Suggestion B

Unfortunately, we live in an age, especially with the advent of social media, that has greatly cheapened the idea of being “blessed” and what “blessing” is. There was a New York Times [article](#), about 10 years ago called “They Feel ‘Blessed.’” In it, the author Jessica Bennett, who to my knowledge is not a believer, lists out a number of ways she saw the term “blessing” used on her social media site: job promotions, speaking gigs, engagements, front row seats to fashion week, etc. She calls out the silliness of it all, writing:

There’s nothing quite like invoking holiness as a way to brag about your life. But calling something “blessed” has become the go-to term for those who want to boast about an accomplishment while pretending to be humble, fish for a compliment, acknowledge a success (without sounding too conceited), or purposely elicit envy. Blessed, “divine or supremely favored,” is now used to explain that coveted Ted talk invite as well as to celebrate your grandmother’s 91st birthday.

Psalms

We see, through the Psalms, that blessing from God—knowing Him, rightly understanding and loving His nature, His glory, His character, and His gospel—is an infinitely richer and more deeply wonderful thing than the “#blessed” lifestyle that so much of the world is craving these days. Being blessed isn’t about living in ideal circumstances. Being blessed is about getting to commune with God and call Him “Father,” which far surpasses any life circumstance we might find ourselves in. God has given us communication with Him, with ourselves, and with others, in order to truly bless His creation, and He wants to see that blessing poured out on *all* people. The blessing of knowing God transcends anything this world has to offer, and we get to communicate that to the world!

Discussion Questions:

- What comes to mind when you think of *blessing*? How have you thought of God’s blessing in the past?
- If you’re honest with yourself, when people look at your life, what sort of blessing do they see you striving for, and what do you think that communicates about how you view God?

EVALUATION

How do students know if they are understanding the text? How does the teacher know if they are understanding it?

Suggestion A

Call and response: What are the three main ways by which God blesses through communication? (*With Him, with others, with ourselves*)

Discussion Questions:

- Which of those three do you struggle with the most? Which do you find the most natural?

Suggestion B

Have students read Psalms 47, 56, and 70 together at their tables, and answer the following question.

Discussion Question:

- Can you identify how the three psalms represent the three different types of communication we’ve discussed? (Answers: *with ourselves* – Ps 56; *with Him* – Ps 70; *to others* – Ps 47)

TRANSITION: Connect Main Point 1 discussion to introduction of Main Point 2.

Book 2 of the Psalms, from Psalm 42 to Psalm 72, deals mainly with the theme of communication, and we’ve seen how **God blesses through communication** with Him, with ourselves, and with others. Now, we’re going to look at those “bookend” psalms at the beginning and end of Book 2, Psalms 42 and 72, to see how we should think about and approach those blessings from Him.

Psalms

EXPLAIN: Main Point 2

TEXT: Psalm 42, Psalm 72

Main Point 2: God's people know, remember, and share His blessings.

OBSERVATIONS and INTERPRETATIONS to support Main Point 2 from the text

What do students need to see and understand from the text?

In the bookends of Book 2 we see a movement in communication from *despair and distance* to *blessing and presence*.

- Psalm 42: Despair and Distance
 - When we are cast down and desperately in need of nourishment for our souls (vv. 1, 5), God is our rock (v. 9), and our salvation (v. 11).
 - This psalm is a prime example of internal communication as a reminder of the primary communication between God and man.
 - The author is feeling far off from God. This is reinforced geographically as he is physically far away (on Mount Mizar) from the temple in Jerusalem (on Mount Moriah).
- Psalm 72: Blessing and Presence
 - The psalmist prays in confidence for the LORD to bring blessing on the new king (vv. 1–17), because God alone does wondrous things (v. 18), ultimately for His own glory (v. 19).
 - KEY POINT: The final result of blessing being communicated is that the whole earth is filled with God's glory and blessing.
 - Because this is a messianic psalm, how God's appointed earthly king rules actually communicates God's character to all nations.
 - God's blessing and presence come when the nation is ruled by a king with godly character, one who rules with justice and righteousness, one who seeks the well-being of all, one who rescues the poor and afflicted.
 - This prayer for a godly king has its ultimate fulfillment in the God King, Jesus the Messiah.

These psalms in particular deal with communication about where the presence of God is found:

- Psalm 42: Because the psalmist feels far off, he reminds himself that the presence of God is not limited to a physical location.
- Psalm 72: In the near-term, the psalmist is praying for an earthly king to manifest the presence of God through godly character. In the long-term, he is longing for the presence of God as true King and Messiah over Israel. It shows the reality that God's presence and rule is everywhere.

Psalm 72 answers the questions in Psalm 42: we have a king who hears, who remembers, and who acts on behalf of those who cry out to Him.

Psalms 42 and 72 focus on the fact that **God's people are meant to know, remember, and share His blessings.**

- Recall the definition of blessing from Main Point 1: blessing = knowing God.
- We know that God is with us by what He has promised and revealed in His Word.
- We remember His presence even in the midst of doubt and despair, reminding ourselves and continually going back to the truth of His blessings as our anchor.

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- We share that blessing with those around us, because God wants all people to know Him (i.e., the final result of blessing discussed above).

ELABORATE

How can students deepen their understanding and apply it to their lives?

Suggestion A

Tim Keller, prior to his passing, used to publish a great series of videos called *Gospel in Life* and one of those videos is about Psalm 42. He titled it, “[Talking to Yourself, Not Listening to Yourself](#).” One of the main things he focuses on in the video is the internal dialogue that the psalmist has with himself, and Keller explains it this way:

[The psalmist] speaks to himself. Have you noticed when he says, “Why are you cast down, O my soul / and why are you disquieted within me?” that he’s not praying to God, but he’s also not speaking to readers? He’s talking to himself. It’s a self dialogue, and this is the very essence of understanding how you yourself can handle anything.

Later in the video, Keller goes on to expound on how this psalm shows how we can talk to ourselves and talk to our hearts in moments of panic or doubt or confusion and preach the truths about God—who He is, what’s He’s planned, and what He’s promised—to ourselves.

By reminding ourselves of truth, which we know because God communicated those truths to us through His Word, we are equipped to confidently and instinctively proclaim those truths to the world.

Discussion Questions:

- When you have moments of doubt, fear, or confusion, what does your internal dialogue look like? How do you try to encourage yourself? What do you say to make yourself feel better? Do you turn to Jesus or to worldly comfort? How might your life look different if your internal dialogue instinctively recalled the things of Jesus?
- What is one rhythm or daily practice you can think of to help you focus your internal dialogue on the truth about God? How do you think that would affect how you encourage others?

Suggestion B

Do we have any *Hunger Games* fans in the room? More specifically, are there any *Hunger Games book* fans? The movies were great, don’t get me wrong, but it’s almost a universal truth in my world that books are way better than the movies. If you’re not familiar with the premise, it’s set in a dystopian post-apocalyptic nation called Panem, and every year 24 kids—12 girls and 12 boys—are randomly selected in a “reaping” to fight to the death in a public arena. Two of the main protagonists are Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mallark, who both end up being chosen in the reaping. It’s a three-book series, so there’s a *lot* that goes on, but toward the end of the whole saga, Peeta has endured so much trauma and torture, both physical and psychological, that there are moments where he has a hard time distinguishing in his mind what’s real and what’s not. So Peeta has to ask. There’s a famous scene, both in the book and the movie, but the book goes into more detail, where Peeta asks Katniss, “You love me. Real or not real?” She tells him, “Real.” It helps anchor him and reassure him that (1) what he’s

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interpreting as reality is actually true, (2) he's loved, and (3) he's not alone. He needs an external source who he trusts to speak truth in a time of turmoil.

The Hunger Games is by no means intentionally allegorical to Scripture, but in this part of the story, what we see with Peeta's character is how vitally important it is to know, remember, and share truth and how disruptive and disorienting it can be when you're not sure what's true. God's people know, remember, and share His blessings because our lives, the very fabric of our reality itself, is meant to be interpreted and lived in light of seeing God's glory and blessing fill the earth for eternity.

Discussion Questions:

- What do you think it looks like to practically live this out: knowing, remembering and sharing God's blessing? Which part(s) feels natural and which feels difficult? Why?

EVALUATION

How do students know if they are understanding the text? How does the teacher know if they are understanding it?

Suggestion A

Call and Response: What do God's people do with His blessings? (*Answer: Know, remember, and share them*)

Discussion Questions:

- What is one truth about God that you want to know and remember this week? Who in your life could you share that blessing with?

Suggestion B

Provide blank sheets of paper at each table. Give students time to choose one truth about God, and write down a verse in Scripture, in Psalms or otherwise, that will help them remember that truth. Have students share with their table groups the verse they chose and how they're going to practice remembering it this week. Encourage them to commit to sharing that truth with one person this week.

CONCLUSION

Suggestions to wrap up and reinforce Lesson Thesis and Main Points 1 and 2

What do students need to walk away with? What do they need to know to dig into next week's text?

God desires and invites all people to know Him, which is the greatest blessing He can possibly give us—to know Him and to be in right relationship with Him. Book 2 of the Psalms shows us that He gives us this **blessing through communication**—communication with Him, with ourselves, and with others. As believers who have received that blessing, we are called **to know, remember, and share that blessing** with the world so that all people may come to know Him and, ultimately, that His name will be glorified in all the earth and among His entire creation.

Psalms

Pray to close the class.

Student Workbook Snapshot for the Following Week

Day	Text	Tools Taught
Introduction	Themes: Communication, All Nations and Peoples, Reign and Refuge	
Day 1	Psalm 46	Repetition/Parallels
Day 2	Psalm 49	Personification, Comparison
Day 3	Psalm 51	Cross Referencing, Center Sentence
Day 4	Psalm 63	Geography, Imagery
Day 5	Psalm 69	Imagery, Repetition
Day 6	Challenge: Daily Prayer	

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Lesson 4: Book 3

Lesson 4 Thesis

Psalms Thesis: The Psalms draw us into God's story and give voice to our own.

Lesson 4 Thesis: God never leaves nor forsakes His people.

Thesis Summary: Yet we are a forgetful people. Israel and her kings forget their God and choose to follow the path of the wicked. Book 3, composed of Psalms 73–89, ushers in DEVASTATION. In His sovereignty, God brings devastation both within and eventually from outside the kingdom through war, famine, and exile. But it is to wake His people up from forgetfulness, rather than to show He has abandoned them. **God never leaves nor forsakes His people.** Though we may move away from Him, He remains always present to correct, to comfort, and to protect. *The LORD is our sovereign sanctuary in the midst of devastation.* This truth compels His people to draw near to God once again. He is our only help in trouble and offers compassion to those who turn back to Him. Therefore, *God's people cry out to Him in suffering knowing He will hear and rescue them.*

Lesson 4 Outline Guide

INTRODUCTION

Teaching Tip: Do a quick recap of the Psalms five-book story arch students learned last week and remind them of the overall thesis of the book of Psalms. Invite the class into this process (ask for help retelling the story and connecting it to the overall thesis) in order to help with overall retention.

Lesson ENGAGE: Introduction and Hook Suggestions (include Lesson Thesis)

How will students be drawn in and understand why the main points are important?

Suggestion A

*Share a personal story of a time when you felt devastated by the circumstances of life, by your sin, or by someone else's sin that directly or indirectly affected you. Was the length of time you had to endure that devastation longer than you wanted or expected? Did you question whether God had abandoned you? Can you look back and see God's good hand in allowing the devastation? How do you now see that He was present with you in that devastation? Describe what happened and what He did, and set up and state the theme that **God never leaves nor forsakes His people.***

Suggestion B

Babies are born with as many as [75 reflexes](#).³ If you touch a newborn's palm, the baby will grasp your

³ Holly Bennet, "Newborn Reflexes: 5 Instincts Your Baby is Born With," Today's Parent, January, 6, 2021, <https://www.todaysparent.com/baby/baby-development/reflexes-5-instincts-your-baby-is-born-with/>.

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finger. If a baby is held upright with their feet gently touching a flat surface, the baby will take what looks like little steps. When the baby needs to communicate, he or she will do so through crying. A mom learns to tell the difference between cries: one says they are hungry. Another says they are in pain. Another says they are tired.

God has designed us as humans to cry from the very first breath we take. And God has given parents the instinct to run to their baby and meet the baby's need when he or she cries out. A good parent never runs away from their child when they cry out in need.

At some point we grow out of our infancy and learn to use language, but we never outgrow crying. Our crying takes on new meanings. For example, we no longer cry when we're hungry (at least some of us don't). One of the reasons God designed us to cry is so we would cry out to Him when we're in pain. And because God is the perfect parent, He runs toward us rather than away when we cry out. He is not indifferent or apathetic to our pain. **God never leaves nor forsakes His people.**

Lesson EXPLORE: Activity and/or Discussion Suggestions

How can students wrestle with the topic before it is taught?

Suggestion A

Discussion Question:

- As a good and wise God, why might He allow or author extended seasons of discipline or suffering for His children?

(Wrap up and transition to EXPLAIN)

*Ask the class to share some of their answers. Help students see that all these reasons point to how **God never leaves nor forsakes His people.** Then share how this truth is shown in the main theme we will see in Book 3 of Psalms: **The LORD is our sovereign sanctuary in the midst of devastation.***

Suggestion B

At your tables, discuss the following questions and compile a list of answers:

- When we experience devastation or discipline, what questions do we often cry out to God in our most honest and raw moments?

Have groups share their list with the class and encourage students to make note of these questions in their student workbooks. (Examples to offer or add to what the class lists: Where are you, God? Where were you, God? How long, O Lord? Are you still good? Have you abandoned me? Have you rejected me? What's the point of obeying your instructions if it can't prevent my suffering?)

Then discuss these questions as an entire class:

- Do any of these questions make you uncomfortable? Is it okay to ask these questions of God? Is there anything we can't cry out to God?

*Connect this discussion to the truth that, no matter what questions we may ask, **God never leaves nor forsakes His people.** Then share how this truth is shown in the main theme we will see in Book 3 of Psalms: **The LORD is our sovereign sanctuary in the midst of devastation.***

Psalms

EXPLAIN: Main Point 1

Book 3 Theme: Devastation

Main Point 1: The LORD is our sovereign sanctuary in the midst of devastation.

OBSERVATIONS and INTERPRETATIONS to support Main Point 1 from the text

What do students need to see and understand from the text?

Though there are multiple themes in Book 3, the main theme is *devastation*—the devastation Israel experiences as their kingdom spirals down into chaos and destruction after the reign of King David. The once prosperous nation was the envy of other rulers like the Queen of Sheba who came to marvel at Solomon’s wealth. But due to the sins of their kings as well as the people, that did not last.

Devastation has two meanings and both apply to what we’ll read in Book 3: “to lay waste; render desolate” and “to overwhelm, as with grief or dismay.” This is devastation from without and from within, both physical and emotional. Book 3 doesn’t just describe the physical devastation of a nation. It also takes us into the emotional experience and response of God’s people to their nation’s physical devastation. In their sorrow, they question if God is absent or has forsaken them. What we discover in Book 3 is that **the LORD is a sovereign sanctuary in the midst of devastation.**

To understand how this devastation came about, it helps to take a look at Israel’s history as a nation.

- Under King David, Israel was united and thriving. Before his death, David appointed his son Solomon as his successor. In the first few chapters of 1 Kings, we discover that Solomon started out strong as a leader: he asked God for wisdom (and was granted his request), he built the temple in Jerusalem to honor God, and he even gained international fame for his riches and wisdom (1 Kings 10:23–24). But things took a turn for Solomon, which we discover in 1 Kings 11:1–8: he loved many pagan women, who turned his heart away from the one true God and toward other gods. “He did evil in the sight of the Lord and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done” (1 Kings 11:6).
 - Solomon’s divided heart resulted in a divided kingdom: Israel in the north (led by Solomon’s adversary) and Judah in the south (ruled by Solomon’s son, Rehoboam).
 - This results in a theme we see throughout 1 and 2 Kings: Where the king goes, so goes the kingdom. In other words, as Israel’s and Judah’s kings cultivated their idolatrous loves, the people they ruled followed their examples by cultivating their own idolatrous loves. When the kings turned to follow and obey God, the people turned to follow and obey God.
- As time passed, both the kings and the people increasingly forgot and rejected God, instead choosing to worship pagan gods and do what these pagan gods required, including practicing child sacrifice.
- In response to His people’s rejection, God sent prophets as His spokesmen to warn Israel and Judah to turn from their idolatrous loves and to, instead, love God. The prophets warned the people they would suffer dire consequences for their sin if they did not repent.
- The people refused to repent. Because of this, the divided kingdoms became *conquered* kingdoms. God used the Assyrians, a brutal people, to conquer Israel and scatter her tribes (see 2 Kings 17:7–23). Judah observed what happened to her sister, but still did not repent and

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follow after God. As a result, God allowed the Babylonians to conquer Judah, destroy Jerusalem and the temple, and take the people away from their homeland into exile.

- As we pick up in Book 3 of the Psalms, the people have been exiled far from the physical city of Jerusalem and the sanctuary where God promised to dwell among them.
- God foretold through His prophets that they would remain in this exile for 70 years and then He would return them to their homeland. But it was a homeland that had been utterly destroyed and needed extensive rebuilding and the construction of a new temple for worship. The physical devastation was obvious.

But as we said, Book 3 doesn't just describe the physical devastation of a nation. It also takes us into the emotional experience and response of God's people to their nation's physical devastation. In their sorrow, they question if God is absent or has forsaken them. But the psalmists in Book 3 always come back to the same answer: God is not absent; the people are. **The LORD is a sovereign sanctuary in the midst of devastation.**

- The LORD is sovereign.
 - God allowed the devastation. He is sovereign in and over what has happened to His people. It's important to note that Israel's devastation was a consequence of the people's ongoing, unrepentant sin. Not all suffering is a direct consequence of our particular sin, but all brokenness and suffering is a consequence of living in a world where everything is touched by sin. In other words, God doesn't punish His children; He disciplines His children. The difference between the two is intention or motivation. To punish centers the punisher. To discipline centers the good of the one being disciplined. God intends good rather than harm for us, in the end, which means we can take comfort when He authors devastation.
 - God disciplined Israel, because He loved her and had a good purpose for her. He did not discipline His people without prior warning and without giving them the opportunity to repent. Remember, He sent many prophets to remind them of truth and warn them away from destruction. When they refused to listen, God separated them from all that He'd given them as an inheritance and blessing: their land, culture, identity, and the temple. Again, God doesn't punish just for punishment's sake. God's discipline always has a good purpose and a worthy goal. God's purpose in exiling His people was to cause them to return to Him, to cause them to release their lesser (and life-destroying) loves, to restore them to holiness, and to once again make Israel a fruitful blessing among the nations.
- The LORD is a sanctuary in the midst of their sorrow.
 - What is a sanctuary? It's a refuge, a place where His presence exists, a comfort, and a place of worship.
 - God didn't simply send the Israelites into exile—He went with them. Though the physical sanctuary was destroyed by their enemies, God was the sanctuary for His people in exile.
 - God was with them in the consequences of their sin, providing refuge and comfort, as well as the opportunity for repentance. The God who exiles is also the God who comforts.

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We might expect Book 3 to be completely dark and hopeless, but along with the theme of devastation are themes of *hope* and *shalom* (peace). How can these work together? As the student workbook says, “God...does not cease to be God simply because His people forget, neglect, and spurn Him. Even when He casts down the king’s crown (Psalm 89:38–45), He is there.” **God never leaves nor forsakes His people.**

ELABORATE

How can students deepen their understanding and apply it to their lives?

Suggestion A

Just as God was sovereign over the Israelites’ suffering, He is sovereign over our suffering. God is like an exacting surgeon operating on a person with a life-threatening infection. The doctor must injure in order to clean out the wound, stitch up the skin, and then help the process of healing and restoration. The doctor’s goal is the patient’s life and health. In the same way, God wounds us in order to heal us.

Give an example, if you have one, of a surgery that was needed and why it was needed. What was broken or wrong? What was the surgeon’s wisdom and expertise that also involved cutting or wounding? How long did it take to heal from the surgery? Do you have a scar that remains? What was the end result? And would you go through the surgery all over again for the result you experienced?

No matter the type of suffering, God can and will use it to make us more like Christ.

Discussion Question(s):

- How does God’s wounding of us also demonstrate His goodness toward us? See Hebrews 12:7–11 for help.
- When you have suffered in the past, have you struggled to trust that God is sovereign over your situation? What enabled you to embrace His sovereignty as His goodness?

Suggestion B

Just as God was with the Israelites in their suffering, He is with us in ours.

Consider a time when you’ve suffered and a friend has greatly ministered to you by simply being present with you. What did that friend do that brought you comfort? How was his or her presence more comforting than something they said or did? And if an imperfect friend’s presence in suffering is such a gift, how much more is God’s perfect presence a comfort to us? He is the source of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3–4), He doesn’t feel discomfort, nor does He run away. He isn’t impatient with our progress or our pain. He knows exactly how we feel (Isaiah 53:3). If He is disciplining us, He is an *exacting* surgeon, never cutting recklessly.

Discussion Questions:

- Are you currently suffering in some way? How has God been a refuge and comfort to you?
- In suffering, are you hesitant to run to God as your sanctuary? Why or why not?

Psalms

EVALUATION

How do students know if they are understanding the text? How does the teacher know if they are understanding it?

Suggestion A

A sanctuary, in terms of a temple, is a place to which we must go. God is not a place, but we must intentionally seek refuge or comfort in Him when we're suffering.

Discussion Questions:

- What do you often seek refuge or comfort in when you're suffering that is not God? How does this affect your suffering?

Suggestion B

Have students respond with true or false answers to the following questions:

- God authored Israel's devastation. (*True*)
- Israel's devastation happened to them without any prior warning. (*False: God forewarned Israel through the prophets and gave them an opportunity to repent.*)
- God disciplined Israel because He loves disciplining people. (*False: God disciplined Israel because He loved her.*)
- God sent Israel into exile and said good luck. (*False: God went with them into exile.*)
- Israel's physical sanctuary was destroyed but God was her present sanctuary in exile. (*True*)

Discussion Question:

- How does the Israelites' devastation and God's presence with them in it give you hope in your own walk with Jesus?

TRANSITION: Connect Main Point 1 discussion to introduction of Main Point 2.

Discipline isn't a walk in the park. No kind of suffering is easy. In fact, it's devastating. The people that we've talked about so far—the Israelites—spent 70 years in exile, suffering the consequences of their sin. What do you think they felt as they endured the exile?

Just as you previously asked students to make a list of questions we ask God in our suffering (see EXPLORE option B), make a list of emotions the Israelites may have felt. Write them on a whiteboard and ask students to record them in their workbook. (For example: despair, regret, doubt, etc.)

So far, we've learned that the main theme of Book 3 is devastation. Despite the pain of suffering, God's people are not without hope in their devastation. **The LORD is our sovereign sanctuary in the midst of devastation.** When God's people understand that He is their sovereign sanctuary in the midst of devastation, they cry out to Him in suffering. And that is our second main point: **God's people cry out to Him in suffering.** That response is seen in the “bookend” psalms of Book 3, Psalms 73 and 89.

Psalms

EXPLAIN: Main Point 2

TEXT: Psalm 73, Psalm 89

Main Point 2: God's people cry out to Him in suffering.

OBSERVATIONS and INTERPRETATIONS to support Main Point 2 from the text

What do students need to see and understand from the text?

The bookend psalms of Book 3 are Psalm 73 and Psalm 89. They show us how God's people cried out to Him in their suffering.

Psalm 73 was written by Asaph, and it is a wisdom psalm. Wisdom psalms were written to provide instruction for living God's way in God's world.⁴ Psalm 73 calls us to learn from the psalmist's suffering.

- Note the type of suffering the psalmist experienced. The psalmist experienced the temptation to envy the wicked for their prosperity and ease of life (v. 3). He is stricken with God's discipline (v. 14) while the wicked are not (v. 5).
- Note the questions the psalmist asked in the midst of his suffering. The questions are implied: I know God is good to Israel, but is God good to me (vv. 1–2)? Have I done what is right and trusted God in vain (v. 13)?
- Note the emotions the psalmist expressed: envy (v. 3), doubt (v. 13), and bitterness (v. 21).

The tone of the psalm and the conclusions of the psalmist turn in vv. 16–17. He is confused and discouraged by what he observes as he contrasts the wicked and the righteous *until* he goes into the sanctuary of God. There, he finds clarity and his perspective changes. He discovers:

- He was wrong about the wicked. He'd only been observing their present experience and not their "end." God sees their wickedness, and they will perish as a result (v. 27).
- He has not done what is right in vain, nor trusted God in vain. In fact, as he peeks behind the curtain, he sees that God Himself is holding, guiding, strengthening, and enduring him (vv. 23–26). He has not been left to his own strength to endure temptation and injustice.

Realizing these truths about God, the psalmist discovers that his feelings don't align with truth, and he immediately cries out to God in his suffering, confessing this to God (vv. 21–22). His faith has been strengthened.

The closing bookend psalm of Book 3 is Psalm 89, which is a song of lament.

Give context for Psalm 89:

- *Read vv. 1–4 aloud.* God promised David that he would have an everlasting kingdom.
- *Read vv. 28–37 aloud.* The promise was secure no matter whether the people obeyed.
- Remember where the people are—they are scattered in Babylon. The kingdom David established has fallen apart. They are under the rule of pagan rulers.

Now read Psalm 89:38–52 aloud and explain:

- The psalmist's complaint to God is that he feels cast off and rejected (v. 38). He questions whether or not God has kept up His end of the bargain (v. 39). He's frustrated and disappointed with what God has allowed (vv. 40–45).

⁴ *Psalms: The Prayers of God's People* by The Village Church, p. 84

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- In response, the psalmist asks God to *remember*: “Remember how short my time is!” (v. 47). “Remember how your servants are mocked” (v. 50). The psalmist also requests answers to his myriad questions.

Psalm 89 is almost a reverse of Psalm 73. Psalm 73 starts with the psalmist’s angst, turns when he goes to the sanctuary, and ends with peaceful resolution. Psalm 89 starts with the psalmist remembering God’s steadfast love and faithfulness, turns to a minor note on “but now” in verse 38, and ends without peaceful resolution. Because of this, Psalm 89 can feel uncomfortable and perhaps even that the psalmist has taken a step too far. A few notes, then:

- Nowhere in Psalm 89 or in the rest of Scripture is the psalmist indicted for sin.
- Psalm 89 is God-inspired and incredibly important to give us both permission and language to cry out to God with our honest thoughts and feelings.
- This is an example of a lament psalm—a song of sorrow, mourning, or regret—and there are many included in the book of Psalms. “Almost half of the psalms are laments with almost three-fourths containing elements of lament, making it the largest category of psalms in the Bible. These psalms voice the pain, sorrow, fear, and grief of the people of God. The main theme of the psalms of lament is: Please help! They teach us how to approach God in prayer with our raw emotions” (*Psalms: The Prayers of God’s People*, The Village Church, p. 72).
- In other words, the psalmist is doing what a person who deeply believes God is a sovereign sanctuary in the midst of devastation would do: he is crying out to God in his suffering. In fact, Psalm 89 is a corporate lament, demonstrating for us that **God’s people cry out to Him in suffering.**

Lament psalms often contain similar elements, and we see them in Psalm 89:

- Turn: The psalmist turns to God.
- Tell: The psalmist pours out his heart to God.
- Ask: The psalmist asks God to act based upon His character (i.e. steadfast love, justice, etc.).
- Trust: The psalmist expresses trust in God.
 - Psalm 89 is a dark psalm, and though it ends with a praise, we can imagine it spoken in a whisper or through a sigh. It’s not a change in tone from the rest of the psalm, but a simple statement of what the psalmist knows is true. The psalm leaves us filled with tension, likely the same tension its writer felt as he lived in devastation.

This week for our Weekly Challenge exercise, we’ll practice writing a lament of our own.

ELABORATE

How can students deepen their understanding and apply it to their lives?

Suggestion A

Psalm 73 is a wisdom psalm, meaning the psalmist is offering his hard-won wisdom to us. His wisdom, in a nutshell, is that in our suffering, we must go to God as our sanctuary. In the confusion of our questions and emotions, God will orient us to what’s true and give us His perspective through which to see our circumstances.

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But usually that orientation and perspective don't come instantaneously. When looking at Psalms 73 and 89 together, we see one aspect of going to God and crying out to God is then *waiting* on God to act, align our emotions with truth, or give us His perspective. For the Israelites in exile, the season of waiting on God to keep His promise of returning home was extremely long.

If you shared a story of prolonged suffering (ENGAGE option A), pick up the story again and describe the wrestling that happened as you waited on God to ease the suffering or give you perspective. Looking back, what were essential elements that enabled you to wait well? What do you wish you would have done differently? In other words, offer your own wisdom to those who are going to God for sanctuary but not yet experiencing resolution.

Discussion Questions:

- Are you waiting on God for something? What has strengthened your faith muscles in the waiting?
- How does God causing us to wait on Him also demonstrate His goodness to us?

Suggestion B

Psalm 89 doesn't record God responding to the cries of His people, but we know from the rest of Scripture that when His people call out to Him, He hears and responds in certain ways:

- God draws near to the brokenhearted. (Psalm 34:18)
- God has compassion for the hurting. (Psalm 103:8)
- Jesus wept with those He loved when He saw they were hurting. (John 11:35)
- Jesus sympathizes with our weakness and temptation. (Hebrews 4:15)
- The Holy Spirit helps us pray when we don't have words. (Romans 8:26)

God is called our "Father," so we can imagine Him responding to us the way a good parent responds to their child when they're crying. Imagine a small child running to his mother, crying out, and lifting his hands as a signal that he wants to be picked up and comforted. What does that good mother do? She drops everything she was doing, immediately picks up her son, draws him to herself, and asks, "What's wrong? Tell me what's wrong." The parent longs to soothe her child. The child goes to the parent, because he believes his mother has the authority and ability to fix whatever is hurting him.

We are called "children of God" for a reason. We have access to the Father, who holds all authority and all comfort. We must go to Him and tell Him what's wrong.

Discussion Questions:

- How do you imagine God views you when you're suffering and in need of comfort from Him? Is He impatient with you or frustrated that you are needy? Or do you know He is eager to receive you?
- Can you think of other Scriptures that detail how God responds when we cry out to Him?
- How does the fact that Psalm 89 is a corporate lament (a song sung in a group) affect your reading of it?

Psalms

EVALUATION

How do students know if they are understanding the text? How does the teacher know if they are understanding it?

Suggestion A

Both Psalms 73 and 89 teach us to cry out to God in our suffering in the form of lament.

Discussion Question:

- Can you name the four essential elements of a lament? (*Answer: Turn, Tell, Ask, Trust*)

Suggestion B

In the midst of devastation, it's important to not let present circumstances lead us into wrong thinking about God.

Discussion Questions:

- What were some of the things the psalmist was wrong about in Psalm 73? What brought about a change in his understanding?

CONCLUSION

Suggestions to wrap up and reinforce Lesson Thesis and Main Points 1 and 2

What do students need to walk away with? What do they need to know to dig into next week's text?

As we close, note that the psalmist's situation in Psalm 73 does not change—only his perspective changes. Psalm 89 ends without resolution. In other words, we shouldn't always require that everything about our faith must be wrapped in a nice, neat bow. As Christians, we live with the tension of waiting on God and of what we experience not always making sense to us. God doesn't always give us understanding, but He always gives us Himself. Although we may not know what He is doing, He will never leave nor forsake us.

Look for this tension in your study of Book 3 this week. Look for:

- Versions of the questions we ask God in our suffering that we compiled as a class
- Emotion words similar to those in Psalm 73 and 89
- Elements of lament: Turn, Tell, Ask, Trust

Pray to close the class.

Psalms

Student Workbook Snapshot for the Following Week

Day	Text	Tools Taught
Introduction	Themes: Devastation, Shalom, Hope	
Day 1	Psalm 74	Notes, Cross References
Day 2	Psalm 78	Allusion
Day 3	Psalm 80	Refrain
Day 4	Psalm 84	Inclusio
Day 5	Psalm 88	Imagery
Day 6	Challenge: Learning to Lament	

Psalms

Lesson 5: Book 4

Lesson 5 Thesis

Psalms Thesis: The Psalms draw us into God's story and give voice to our own.

Lesson 5 Thesis: God prunes, endures, and gives hope to His people.

Thesis Summary: Devastation brings forth MATURATION in Book 4, composed of Psalms 90–106. God wants His people to flourish and is zealous for them to bear fruit to the end. Like a skillful gardener, **God prunes, endures, and gives hope to His people**, even using devastation to cut away what hinders our growth. It is a mark of His steadfast love that He will not leave us as infants in our faith. *God is faithful to mature His people.* The exiled people of Israel show us that growing in maturity means trusting God in the devastation and counting Him worthy of worship, regardless of present suffering. When faced with hardships, *the righteous respond in humility and praise* through remembrance, confession, repentance, and thanksgiving.

Lesson 5 Outline Guide

INTRODUCTION

Teaching Tip: Do a quick recap of the Psalms five-book story arch students learned last week and remind them of the overall thesis of the book of Psalms. Invite the class into this process (ask for help retelling the story and connecting it to the overall thesis) in order to help with overall retention.

Lesson ENGAGE: Introduction and Hook Suggestions (include Lesson Thesis)

How will students be drawn in and understand why the main points are important?

Suggestion A

Tell a personal story that relates to the idea of “pruning.” The idea is to get students to understand the metaphor (comparison) that pruning gets rid of unnecessary or dead parts of a plant in order to help the plant thrive and bear the most fruit.

- *Example:* When I was growing up, I loved going with my mom to get her hair cut. I loved going because her hairdresser owned this old historic house that he'd converted into his salon, and it had the absolute most beautiful garden I have ever seen that encompassed the whole house. When you walked up the driveway, there was this beautiful iron rod arch with vines weaving through it, flowers of all different colors, and greenery everywhere. Fascinated by his ability to cultivate this beautiful landscape, I remember asking him one time what his secret was. He told me that while there's a lot of obvious things that go into it, like giving the plants enough water, the plants getting the right amount of sunlight, dealing with bugs and other vermin, but the most important piece that everything else hinged on was *pruning*. He said there was absolutely no way that his garden could survive, let alone thrive, if he didn't regularly prune the plants, removing the weak and diseased and injured parts to allow each plant to grow and endure in

Psalms

its environment. With that, he stressed that not only pruning, but *the right kind of pruning* was key. He said that improper pruning can kill a plant as easily, or sometimes more quickly, than not doing it all. It takes great care, skill, and expertise to prune well.

When I think about my walk with the Lord and what we're going to see in Book 4 of the Psalms, it is clear how important this idea of pruning is in the life of a believer. This week, we're going to dive into how **God prunes, endures, and gives hope to His people**. Much like plants who require a skilled gardener to prune their damaged and rotten parts or get rid of excessive leafing that can hinder fruitfulness, God carefully and skillfully prunes His people, and in doing so, endures them in their walk with Him, allows them to bear fruit, and gives them hope to the end.

Suggestion B

In the early 1990s, scientists peered into the inner workings of a cell, and they saw something incredible. They observed the cell destroying its own proteins and organ-like parts called “organelles”—structures that it had invested heavily into building.

This process would later be known as autophagy, which literally means “self-eating.” It is something so vital to our survival that one of the pioneering scientists of this concept, Yoshinori Ohsumi, was awarded the 2016 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for his discovery. Ohsumi described the discovery of this complex process as a surprise. He watched as cells wrapped entire proteins and organelles in a protective membrane—and then shredded them to pieces with enzymes. He described it as the equivalent of watching a wrecking ball take down a skyscraper, reducing a majestic work of architecture into a pile of bricks.

As Ohsumi’s team investigated further, the metaphor changed: Autophagy isn’t cellular self-cannibalism so much as it is cellular *pruning*. A cell that was indiscriminately destroying pieces of itself was not going to last long, but one that could select broken and malignant proteins and recycle them into something new would flourish.

Since Ohsumi’s work in the early 1990s, researchers around the world have found evidence of autophagy in every tissue of the human body. Old proteins are turned into new ones, bacteria are destroyed, and the nutrients bound up are redirected into more critical processes. God has actually designed our bodies to undergo a process that, though microscopic, is a physical manifestation of how He works to prune His people.

This week, we’re going to dive into how **God prunes, endures, and gives hope to His people**. Much like the autophagy that is happening in our bodies as we speak, for those who He calls, God sets out to remove the broken and malignant parts of our spirits and lives, and in doing so, endures us in our walk with Him and gives us hope to the end.

Lesson EXPLORE: Activity and/or Discussion Suggestions

How can students wrestle with the topic before it is taught?

Suggestion A

Have students think of a time when they needed to have endurance. Maybe it was physical endurance, like running a marathon. Perhaps it was mental endurance, like sticking with a really

Psalms

difficult project and work and hitting all your deadlines. Have students discuss their experiences and talk through what endurance feels like with their table groups.

Suggestion B

Give students a blank sheet of paper and provide the following prompt:

- Write down 2–3 names of people you would describe as “spiritually mature.” These can be people you know personally, but they don’t have to be.

After writing down those names, have them take a few minutes to think about what traits these people have that make them mature. Are there any common traits or themes that came up?

EXPLAIN: Main Point 1

Book 4 Theme: Maturation

Main Point 1: God is faithful to mature His people.

OBSERVATIONS and INTERPRETATIONS to support Main Point 1 from the text

What do students need to see and understand from the text?

The overall theme of Book 4 of the Psalms is the idea of *maturation*. It focuses on how God matures His people in their faith as they endure suffering.

- How do we define *maturation*? Maturation is turning to God in every circumstance and then being transformed to look more like Him.
- We see that fleshed out in how **God is faithful to mature His people**. We serve a God who shows us what is true about Him, which allows us to build our lives around the bedrock of truth that God is our Creator, our King, and our Savior. In turning to Him, especially in the midst of suffering, He is faithful to mature us by deepening our faith in that unshakeable truth.

From the student workbook:

Psalms Book 3 ends with a minor chord: Where are You, God? Why aren’t You listening? Are You there, God? Psalms Book 4 marks an uplift in the song. It sings of how God prunes, endures, and gives hope to His people. Hope is not lost. It always remains, for God remains, from eternity to eternity, everlasting to everlasting (Psalm 90:1, 106:48). Psalms Book 4 opens with a psalm of Moses, which theologian O. Palmer Robertson suggests “plays a pivotal role” in setting the listener in a time when God—not man—was King of Israel. In addition, Moses prayed for the people in the wilderness (Exodus 32). Now he prays for the people in exile. At the same time Moses reminds the Israelites that God has not abandoned them. No matter where they are, God is their refuge in every generation. He is their unfailing and unfading hope.

There is a natural connection between Books 3 and 4. As it is explained in the student workbook (p. 113): “If devastation is the catalyst that turns God’s people away from failed dreams and false gods, maturation is the process by which they transform.” God’s devastation leads to maturation.

- Definition of *maturation*: turning to God and then being transformed to look more like Him
- Purpose of maturation: to transform us so that we may see God glorified both now, through holiness in our own lives, and forever when He restores all things to Himself

Psalms

- For God's people, there is always purpose in the devastation. God was good to Israel in the midst of their devastation, exile, and suffering, and He continues to be good to bring them through it and into maturity.

As we see in the themes for this book (in the student workbook), we have a faithful and just King:

- God is a faithful King:** There is a wonderful and resonant honesty and transparency to these psalms, which juxtapose the faithfulness of God with the faithlessness of the people. **God is faithful to mature His people.**
 - He is the proactive counselor, the mover, and the initiator of the maturation process, in spite of our faithlessness.
 - Important elements to highlight are that God remains the same and the role of God's steadfast love in this process toward maturity.
 - God is good to mature His people, regardless of our constant failings to remain steadfast to Him.
- God is a just King:** God is right to judge the wicked and refine the righteous.
 - Maturation is reserved for the people of God. Those who are not His children, those who are His enemies, will be judged for their wickedness and disobedience.
 - Potentially reference Halim's [recent sermon](#) on Hebrews 6, highlighting the difference between Judas and Peter (regret vs. repentance).

ELABORATE

How can students deepen their understanding and apply it to their lives?

Suggestion A

Share a personal story or lived experience where you saw the negative effects of a bad gardener or lack of pruning. This is especially useful if using the ENGAGE option A.

- Example:** It was a sad day for that once beautiful garden when my mom's hairdresser decided to sell his business and leave town. Eventually, that garden in all its beauty and life and flourishing withered away. It still makes me sad when I go back to visit family and I drive past that house. It's now overrun by weeds, brown, and not even a shadow of the thriving garden it used to be... because no one was there to prune it. No one was there to care for it. No one was there to continue cultivating it. Without God's faithfulness to mature us, we would wither away just like that once-beautiful garden did.

Then end with: We cannot hope to thrive as followers of Jesus without God leading us in maturity. And maturation and pruning in the life of the believer aren't without their growing pains. Sanctification is hard, it's sometimes tedious, there's a lot of failure, and it takes a long time; but the spiritual flourishing God has for us in it is worth it. Because we serve a faithful God, we can have confidence that He will continue to mature His people in every season, and that He's not going anywhere.

Discussion Questions:

- When you think of maturing in your faith, what comes to mind? Do you think of God working in you, or do you think about what you have to do to achieve it? How does this idea of God being faithful to mature His people change or frame your view of maturation?

Psalms

Suggestion B

Share a personal story of how God matured you in your faith through suffering. Discuss the difficulties surrounding that season and how God endured you, even in the midst of devastation. How did He sustain you? How did His faithfulness affect your relationship with and faith in Him?

Discussion Questions:

- At your tables, share a time where you experienced suffering. What was that like? Looking back now (or at this current season), how can you see God's faithfulness in the midst of that difficult season?

EVALUATION

How do students know if they are understanding the text? How does the teacher know if they are understanding it?

Suggestion A

Call and response:

- Fill in the blanks: God is _____ (*faithful*) to _____ (*mature*) His people.
- What is the definition of maturation?
- What is the purpose of maturation?

Discussion Questions:

- How would you have defined maturation when you first walked in tonight? Has that changed at all after this lesson?

Suggestion B

At their tables, have students work together to write a summary of the lesson in 2–3 sentences. Call everyone back together and have a few (or all) of the tables share what they came up with.

Discussion Questions:

- What did you learn from the other tables' summaries? What's something that stuck out to you from the summaries?

TRANSITION: Connect Main Point 1 discussion to introduction of Main Point 2.

If **God is faithful to mature His people**, then what should our response be? For God's people, those whom He calls to Himself and makes righteous, we are called to **respond in humility and praise**. The two bookend psalms of Book 4—Psalms 90 and 106—illustrate this response.

Psalms

EXPLAIN: Main Point 2

TEXT: Psalm 90, Psalm 106

Main Point 2: The righteous respond in humility and praise.

OBSERVATIONS and INTERPRETATIONS to support Main Point 2 from the text

What do students need to see and understand from the text?

God is faithful to mature His people, and in doing so, **the righteous respond in humility and praise**.

But how do we know if we are maturing? Mature people bless the Lord, because they have a right view of who He is. We bless the Lord by:

- Humbling ourselves before Him (Psalms 90:12, 106:2) – We continue to choose the righteous path (connects back to the two paths in Week 1), which includes remembrance, confession, repentance, thanksgiving, and praise.
- Praising Him – In both psalms, we see the psalmist proclaiming God “from everlasting to everlasting.” Psalm 90 starts with it (90:2), while Psalm 106 ends with it (106:48).

Psalm 90: God is our dwelling place

- Three stanzas describing the result of God’s wrath
- Verse 12: teach us to number our days *that* we get wisdom
- The psalmist asks God to return to them and give them favor

Psalm 106: Give thanks to the Lord for He is good

- It recalls all the ways Israel sinned (vv. 6–39) and that God gave them over to their enemies.
- He looked upon their distress.
- The psalmist asks God to save them.

The connection between devastation and maturation is present here as well:

- In devastation, God’s people found that false gods are worthless (106:19–23).
- In maturation, God’s people trust God in devastation and count Him fully worthy of worship and praise, no matter the circumstance.

In Books 1–3, blessing is what God gives to us. In Book 4, the people respond by blessing His name and praising Him forever.

A key piece to highlight is the focus in Psalm 90 on how fleeting our time on this earth is

- We’re dust, and our time on earth is very short.
- Connect this with the fact that Book 4 is the shortest of the five books within Psalms.
- We have a short window of time to walk in maturity. In Psalm 90:12, the psalmist highlights that we should be cognizant of that *so that* we get a heart of wisdom. There’s a sense of urgency and proactivity here.

ELABORATE

How can students deepen their understanding and apply it to their lives?

Suggestion A

Psalms

What does it actually look like, in practice, to be mature or to grow in maturity? There is a [scene](#) in the show *Parks and Rec* where two of the characters, April and Andy, who share a house with their friend Ben, decide to throw a massive Halloween party at their house and don't tell Ben about it. Ben is obviously unhappy about the situation, but instead of confronting them, he sulks in his room while occasionally coming out to passive-aggressively hint at what's bothering him. Andy, who is well-established in the show as a "lovable man-child," decides to take matters into his own hands and confront Ben about it. He tells Ben, "You're angry at me, and you're not talking about it, and I'm going to beat you up until you do, because *I'm mature!*"

One of the great things about sitcoms is that the things they portray are a lot funnier on screen than they are in real life. This scene is comedy gold, because it's such an accurate portrayal of how "maturity" is typically viewed in our culture. Andy's self-declaration of maturity is obviously silly and humorous, because the decision to physically beat up a friend isn't exactly steeped in wisdom—but his motives aren't altogether immature either. He cares about this friend, so therefore, he is confronting him when his friend refuses to be honest. The secular view of maturity is often a subjective idea that's dependent on how we're behaving in relation to other people.

The type of maturation we're talking about here is something wholly different. Maturity for God's people is oriented around and measured by one thing: a right view of God (*humility*) and how we live accordingly (*praise*). In this, we see that **the righteous respond in humility and praise**.

We said earlier that maturity for God's people looks like remembrance, confession, repentance, thanksgiving, and praise. *Walk students through each of those, highlighting how they point to a response of humility and praise.*

Discussion Questions:

- Of the different elements of maturity we discussed—remembrance, confession, repentance, thanksgiving, and praise—which is an area you want to grow in? What is one truth about God that can help you practice it well?

Suggestion B

In his [article](#) for TGC titled, "Without Christian Maturity We'll Remain Spiritual Adolescents," Graham Heslop poses a question to his readers: "Christian, do you want to grow up?" He talks about spending time with his four-year-old son who, like so many kids, can't wait to grow up. Graham presents it this way:

Like my son, I should want to grow up in my faith. I should desire Christian maturity. All Christians should pursue spiritual progress. As the apostle Paul famously puts it, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways" (1 Corinthians 13:11). This is "so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves" (Ephesians 4:14). Thus God's children should desire and therefore pursue Christian maturity. This glorifies God, is good for other Christians, and guards us against error. We have many ambitions. But Christian maturity is rarely one of them. The problem is, of course, that most of us don't aspire towards Christian maturity. We have many ambitions. But growing up in our faith is rarely one of them. Unlike my son, we are fairly content with our present maturity, even immaturity. But this shouldn't be the case.

Psalms

It's a truth that, at times, is difficult to stomach. But Heslop puts a pretty fine point on much of the attitude towards Christian maturity that plagues the modern church. Too often, we see the fruits of righteous maturity—remembrance, confession, repentance, thanksgiving, and praise—as optional. They're things we might dabble in from time to time, but do they truly permeate throughout our lives?

NOTE: It will likely be helpful to address the apprehension this may produce. You may have students who think, “Wait, I thought you said God is the one maturing me? He’s the actor and I’m the recipient. This feels contradictory.” Work through how (i) God maturing us and (ii) our response in humility/praise work in tandem. This would be a good time to drive home the endurance and hope pieces of the overall lesson thesis.

Discussion Questions:

- Can you identify any areas of apathy or indifference to your desire for Christian maturity? How can you reframe that attitude in light of our call as followers of God to respond to Him in humility and praise?

EVALUATION

How do students know if they are understanding the text? How does the teacher know if they are understanding it?

Suggestion A

Large group class discussion:

- The righteous respond in humility and praise. What are tangible examples of how we can do that?

Discussion Question:

- *Same question as above to be discussed at their tables*

Suggestion B

Take some time at your tables and pray. Thank God that He matures us in our faith and that we can come to Him in humility to glorify His name. Pray for each other by name, each student praying for the person to their right, that God would bring them into a season of significant maturity and sanctification this fall.

CONCLUSION

Suggestions to wrap up and reinforce Lesson Thesis and Main Points 1 and 2

What do students need to walk away with? What do they need to know to dig into next week’s text?

Psalms Book 4 should produce immense hope for those who follow Jesus. We serve a God who is near to us and sustains us in the midst of suffering. Even in devastation and turmoil, He is there. **God prunes, endures, and gives hope to His people.** While the road of maturity in faith is never easy, it allows us to turn to God and delight in who He is. **God is faithful to mature His people,** and He

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matures us so that we may look more like Him and ultimately share in giving Him the glory only He deserves. **The righteous respond in humility and praise** and do so as we look forward to the day when God reigns in glory from everlasting to everlasting.

Pray to close the class.

Student Workbook Snapshot for the Following Week

Day	Text	Tools Taught
Introduction	Themes: Maturation, Compassionate Creator, Faithful and Just King	
Day 1	Psalm 92	Compare/Contrast, Simile, Metaphor
Day 2	Psalm 94	Imagery
Day 3	Psalm 99	Cross References, Refrain
Day 4	Psalm 101	Compare/Contrast, Repetition, Parallels
Day 5	Psalm 102	Superscription, Audience, Imagery
Day 6	Challenge: Silence & Solitude	

Psalms

Lesson 6: Book 5

Lesson 6 Thesis

Psalms Thesis: The Psalms draw us into God's story and give voice to our own.

Lesson 6 Thesis: God always fulfills His promises and purposes.

Thesis Summary: Book 5 crescendos this symphony into RESTORATION with Psalms 107–150. As His people grow in maturity, they look forward to the day when God's reign is realized in its fullness. And it will be realized, because **God always fulfills His promises and purposes.** Israel's restoration in the land of promise after exile is a precursor to the ultimate restoration that will be experienced in all heaven and earth when *God brings restoration to all things* through the return of our Messiah, King Jesus. Then, not only His people will give praise to His glorious name, but all creation will join in the chorus. All will know that He has created, sustained, redeemed, and restored all things to Himself. As we enjoy His blessings now and await that coming day of jubilee, *let everything that has breath praise the Lord!*

Lesson 6 Outline Guide

INTRODUCTION

Teaching Tip: Do a quick recap of the Psalms five-book story arch students learned last week and remind them of the overall thesis of the book of Psalms. Invite the class into this process (ask for help retelling the story and connecting it to the overall thesis) in order to help with overall retention.

Lesson ENGAGE: Introduction and Hook Suggestions (include Lesson Thesis)

How will students be drawn in and understand why the main points are important?

Suggestion A

Have you ever been away from home for an extended time or lived in a country so different from your own that you experienced extreme disequilibrium and homesickness? If you have, you know that home can seem so distant that it's jarring to your sense of identity to be away from it. You may hear a song, think of a person, or crave food that makes you yearn for home, yet you know you can't go there and probably won't be there for a long time. Homesickness is one of the worst feelings in the world.

If you have a personal story of being homesick or experiencing the disorientation of living in a different culture, describe what you felt when you were away from home. What did you long for?

While homesickness is one of the worst feelings in the world, getting home after being gone for a long period of time is one of the best feelings. There is a sense of peace, fulfillment, and satisfaction that washes over us the minute we step through the door and are reunited with those we love. Home is a word with a strong emotional connotation. It carries with it a sense of longings being fulfilled and of

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being fully who we are and where we're meant to be.

In our study this week, we're going to journey with the Israelites as they return home from their exile. We've already read the songs they sang in the disorientation of their devastation and maturation. They were songs full of longing, enduring, and hoping for God to fulfill His promises to them. Now we'll get to step through the door of their home with them, so to speak, and hear their songs of praise and joy as they discover **God always fulfills His promises and purposes**. This is our main idea as we begin to explore Book 5 of the Psalms: **God always fulfills His promises and purposes**.

Suggestion B

Have you ever been on the receiving end of a broken promise? What happened? What were the consequences of that broken promise? What hopes were dashed as a result?

Share a personal story relating to this, explaining how trust and relationship with the promise-breaker were affected. If you reconciled with the promise-breaker, what did that require? Then connect your story with the story of God's people.

God's people (and we) are promise-breakers. The Israelites, as we've discovered throughout our study, rejected God and broke their promise to serve and love Him alone. God promised His people He would never leave nor forsake them. At times, when God authored their devastation, the people wondered if God had forgotten or taken back His promise. But God is not a promise-breaker. **God always fulfills His promises and purposes**. That's why we can put all our hopes in Him.

Lesson EXPLORE: Activity and/or Discussion Suggestions

How can students wrestle with the topic before it is taught?

Suggestion A

At their tables or as an entire class, ask students if there are certain promises in Scripture that they struggle to believe God can or will fulfill. For example, Jesus promised He would return. It's been such a long time since He came the first time, and many look around at the mess in our world and struggle to believe He's coming back for us. Contribute an example of your own as the class shares.

Suggestion B

At their tables or as an entire class, ask students if there are certain plans or purposes that they struggle to believe God is powerful enough to fulfill or perhaps even willing to fulfill. For example, God says in Romans 8:28 "that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." Sometimes it's hard to believe this. Contribute an example of your own as the class shares.

Psalms

EXPLAIN: Main Point 1

Book 5 Theme: Restoration

Main Point 1: God brings restoration to all things.

OBSERVATIONS and INTERPRETATIONS to support Main Point 1 from the text

What do students need to see and understand from the text?

The primary theme of Book 5 is *restoration*, when all of God's promises and purposes come to their final fulfillment. As O. Palmer Robertson puts it:

"The end of the book of Psalms reflects its beginning. The vision portrayed in Psalms 1 and 2, is depicted as having been realized. A kingdom of righteousness that is wholly in accord with [the Law] finally exists, and will continue throughout eternity. ... Nations and people are ruled jointly and unitedly by Yahweh and his Messiah."⁵

Restoration can be defined in various ways:

- returning something to its unimpaired state
- a restitution of something that was lost
- a putting back into a former position or dignity
- renewal, revival, or reestablishment
 - All of these definitions help us understand the context of Book 5: **God brings restoration to all things.**

As we learned in previous weeks, God authored Israel's devastation, allowing them to be conquered and taken into exile by their enemies. Just as He does with us, God used this time of discipline to bring maturation in His children. But the Israelites still longed to leave exile and return home. In the last psalm of Book 4, the people pray, "Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise" (106:47). In Book 3 and 4, we studied psalms where they cried out to God in their sufferings, longing to be reunited with their beloved city—Jerusalem—and with one another. But their primary longing was to be restored as a people to God.

The people's hopes and longings were fulfilled by God!

- Israel was in exile for 70 years (just as God said would happen). God utilized pagan leaders to return His people home to restore the temple and their land (see Ezra 1).
- The exiles returned in waves to begin the rebuilding process, which you can read about in Ezra and Nehemiah.
- God ended the devastation He'd authored and, as our previously mentioned definitions describe, He returned the people to their former position, reestablished them in the land, and ushered in renewal.
- And so, Book 5 is filled with praise songs, God's people exulting in the recognition that **God brings restoration to all things.**

Listen to the words of the psalmist in Psalm 116:1–9 as he praises God for restoration. *Read this passage aloud.*

⁵ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms: Discovering their Structure and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 230.

Psalms

Although God's people rightly praise Him because He is a God who **brings restoration to all things**, the Israelites' restoration wasn't fully complete. With God's help, they rebuilt the temple, their cultural identity, and the wall around Jerusalem. God restored His people to Himself. But the propensity toward sin that had landed them in exile in the first place was not something they could eradicate on their own. Their hearts still needed restoration. Therefore, there is both a "now" and "still coming" aspect to Israel's restoration.

ELABORATE

How can students deepen their understanding and apply it to their lives?

Suggestion A

As the student workbook says, "[God] restores His people to Israel and Jerusalem, yet they await their promised king, the person we know as Jesus."

They awaited this promised king as their hope for restored hearts (see Ezek. 36:25 and Jer. 24:7). Jesus is the Messiah who came to cleanse us of sin and restore our hearts so we can enjoy a right relationship with God. Through Jesus, **God brings restoration to all things**.

Like the Israelites, we too now live in a "now" and "still coming" restoration. Through Jesus, we have been restored into right relationship with God. But we wait for the full restoration of all things:

- Creation (Romans 8:19–23)
- Life as it was meant to be (1 Cor. 15:20–22, 26)
- The rule and reign of Christ, and with it righteousness and justice (1 Cor. 15:24)
- Our bodies (1 Cor. 15:42–49)

Like the Israelites, we too are considered exiles and sojourners in this world.

- Exile = prolonged separation from one's country or home
- Sojourner = one who lives or stays temporarily

We, in a sense, live in Babylon, far from our true home. Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20), not Austin, Texas. "Here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come" (Heb. 13:14). Although we have been saved from our sins, because we live in the flesh, we wait for our promised Savior who will take us home and restore us completely.

As exiles and sojourners, we're given instruction on how to live in 1 Peter 2:9–12:

- We're exiled *together*. There is a necessary communal aspect to our faith.
- We're to proclaim how God has already restored us and will restore us.
- We're to abstain from the passions of the flesh.
- We're to keep our conduct honorable before the citizens of this world so they'll see our good deeds and glorify God.

Discussion Questions:

- When you imagine the exiles living in Babylon and waiting for their deliverance and their return home, what do you hope you'd find them doing? What would you tell them as they waited for God to fulfill His promise to them?

Psalms

- Does this challenge you in your own waiting? As an exile and sojourner, do you need to live differently in some way that better demonstrates your true citizenship?

Suggestion B

As the student workbook says, “We can empathize with the Israelites. We, too, live in a tension of “now and not yet.” We wait like the watchmen in Psalm 130, anticipating Jesus’ return when “everything that breathes praise[s] the LORD” (Psalm 150:6).

Share a personal story about waiting for someone/something that illustrates the idea of “watchfulness.”

Example: I have a friend, Valeri, whose husband, Craig, is a JAG lawyer. A few months after they got married, he was sent to Afghanistan for a 12-month deployment. Valeri knew he’d be gone about 12 months, but she didn’t know the exact time or date he’d come back, even up to the last hour. I asked Valeri what insights she could give about how waiting for Craig to come home correlates to our waiting for Christ to return and restore all things. Valeri said, “There was no way I was going to miss Craig’s return from that deployment, even though it could have been in the middle of the night. Even though I was never given a firm time and day, I was going to be sure to be there and to be waiting and eager to celebrate his return. I was always preparing, even way ahead of time. In fact, I started preparing for his return as soon as he left.” The biblical word that Valeri is describing is being *watchful*, like the watchman in Psalm 130.

What we’re watching for is a *sure thing*, because **God brings restoration to all things**. Jesus told his disciples through parables that we should “stay awake.” Like a watchman on the wall, be alert, ready, prepared to take action, searching for signs. Don’t be lulled to sleep. Don’t be caught unaware. Don’t get distracted.

Being watchful is not about making sure we don’t get caught with our hand in the cookie jar or making sure the good scale is up over the bad scale at the particular moment that Jesus returns. Being watchful is about *longing*. A longing for home. We’re to consider how we can stir up our longing for Christ and our life with him forever.

Discussion Questions:

- What would it look like for you to be watchful? To keep awake and sober?
- What stirs your longing for Jesus, for your true home, and for Jesus’ return? Are you cultivating those longings?

EVALUATION

How do students know if they are understanding the text? How does the teacher know if they are understanding it?

Suggestion A

God brings restoration to all things.

Psalms

Discussion Questions:

- What has Jesus already restored? What has He promised to restore that we're waiting to see fulfilled?

Suggestion B

We are exiles and sojourners in this world, waiting for our final restoration.

Discussion Questions:

- What is an exile? What is a sojourner?

TRANSITION: Connect Main Point 1 discussion to introduction of Main Point 2.

God always fulfills His promises and purposes, so the Israelites experienced their hopes being fulfilled in God. Despite the “still coming” aspect of restoration, the Israelites return home, shouting their praises to God for His “now” restoration. Can you imagine the singing as the exiles made their way home? As they live in an answer to prayer for deliverance? As they anticipate restoration?

Because **God brings restoration to all things**, the only right response is that everything that has breath will praise the Lord. Naturally, then, the entire psalter leads to a final crescendo, like cymbals crashing: **“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!”**

EXPLAIN: Main Point 2**TEXT:** Psalm 107, Psalm 150

Main Point 2: Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!

OBSERVATIONS and INTERPRETATIONS to support Main Point 2 from the text

What do students need to see and understand from the text?

We find the phrase **“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!”** in the very last verse of the psalter, Psalm 150:6. All who have breath, we’re told, are to respond with hallelujahs. As one commentary says, “Who must praise the Lord? It is everyone’s business.”⁶ Hallelujah simply means “Praise the Lord!”

We see this call for all who have breath to praise the Lord in our opening bookend psalm, Psalm 107. The redeemed are gathered in from various places and experiences. They recount what God has done and are called to praise Him. Note the repeated phrases throughout the psalm.

- Verses 4–9
 - These exiles were gathered in from wandering in desert wastes.
 - They were lost, hungry, and thirsty. Their souls fainted.
 - “He delivered them from their distress.”

⁶ Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (p. 953). Peabody: Hendrickson.

Psalms

- What is their right response? “Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!”
- Verses 10–16
 - These exiles were gathered in from sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death.
 - They were prisoners in affliction, fallen down with no one to help them.
 - “He delivered them from their distress.”
 - What is their right response? “Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!”
- Verses 17–22
 - These exiles were gathered in from affliction resulting from their sin.
 - They had lost their appetite. They were near death.
 - “He delivered them from their distress.”
 - What is their right response? “Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!”
- Verses 23–32
 - These exiles were gathered in from terror on the seas.
 - They lived in great fear.
 - “He delivered them from their distress.”
 - What is their right response? “Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!”

God is concerned for and delivers people out of various kinds of distress. As a response, all are called to thank Him for His love and the work He's done on their behalf. We hear echoes in this of “**Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!**”

We see in vv. 33-43 that God reverses the fortunes of people (hungry souls are satisfied, prisoners are set free, needy are raised out of affliction). But we also see creation restored to its most life-giving and fruitful state:

- Storms are calmed.
- Rivers are turned into deserts.
- Fruitful land is turned into a salty waste.

Notice *why* God does the work of restoration:

- The upright will see it, recognize it for what it is, and will be glad (v. 42).
- The wicked will see it, recognize it for what it is, and will be silenced (v. 42).
- All will stop and consider the steadfast love of the Lord (v. 43).

We began in Psalm 1 and Book 1 with confrontation: man is confronted with reality and is called to choose the way of the righteous. The righteous are blessed and respond in trust and worship. We end with Psalm 150 and Book 5 where all respond in recognition to the reality of God's steadfast love and worth.

Psalm 150 concludes Book 5 and the entire psalter. The psalms leading up to the conclusion grow shorter and have a quicker pace, indicating excitement and emphasis. They build to what seems like a cymbal crash at the height of a symphonic piece with Psalm 150. And within Psalm 150, the phrase with greatest emphasis seems to be v. 6: “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!”

Psalms

The exiles are home. Praise the Lord! The Lord has restored and delivered. Praise the Lord! None stand apart from His ability to redeem and restore. Praise the Lord!

Notably, the word *hallelujah*, which appears many times in Book 5, does not make an appearance in the Bible again until Revelation 19. In Revelation 18, just before the word appears, the Bible describes the fall of Babylon, a euphemism for Satan and evil. In Revelation 19, all of heaven cries out, “Hallelujah!” Why? Because God has worked His final deliverance, and the marriage supper of the Lamb can now commence. It’s a picture of full restoration, of the old passing away and the new coming. The exiles—that’s us—will finally be home, and we’ll say, “Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!”

ELABORATE

How can students deepen their understanding and apply it to their lives?

Suggestion A

We don’t have to wait until Revelation 19 becomes a reality to say, “Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!” We can follow the exiles’ example by recounting our own story of salvation or deliverance from suffering as a way of savoring God’s goodness and joining in the chorus, **“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!”**

Share your own personal story of how God saved you or delivered you out of a difficult situation. Use the framework given in Psalm 107:1–32, describing:

- Where you were or what was happening when you were in need of deliverance
- Descriptors of your experience and what you were feeling
- A memorable moment when you cried out to the Lord and what you asked of Him
- How God delivered you
- What your response was (hopefully, “Praise the Lord!”) and what you discovered about God’s character in how He acted on your behalf

Recounting God’s faithfulness to us spurs our thanksgiving and praise and is an important spiritual discipline.

Discussion Questions:

- At tables, share about a time when you cried out to God for deliverance and He answered. Share the specifics of your story according to the framework we saw in Psalm 107.
 - Spend time praising the Lord together and recounting His steadfast love. After each person shares, say aloud as a group, **“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!”**
- Just as the exiles publicly praised God, name who you will share your story or part of your story with this week as a way of giving Him praise.

Suggestion B

The exiles’ restoration was a gift of grace from God. They weren’t entitled to it. They did nothing to earn it or make it happen. They simply received their redemption, as we would a special gift.

Share a short illustration of the delight of gift-giving.

Psalms

- *Example:* I think of Christmases as a child with my grandparents. All of my aunts, uncles, cousins, my parents, and my sister would gather in one big room to open presents. It was a free-for-all, everyone tearing into their presents at once. I remember as a child marveling at my grandparents, who simply watched. They delighted in watching their grandchildren open their gifts, exclaiming and enjoying what they received.

When we give gifts that we've specifically chosen for those we love, we delight when they delight in what we've given. We would be distraught if they felt they had to repay the gift or if they immediately set it aside without offering sincere thanks.

God is the same way. He has given us the ultimate gift in Jesus: restoration in relationship to Him and future restoration of all things. He did it because He loved us (John 3:16), and because He is the ultimate gift-giver, He simply wants us to receive and enjoy the gift. Receiving and enjoying the gift starts with thanksgiving and praise.

Sometimes we get hung up on feeling unworthy of the gift, or we feel we must repay the gift. However, the fact that we don't deserve the gift of salvation and God willingly and joyfully gave it anyway makes it all the sweeter. Be glad! Marvel! Praise and thank the Lord! **"Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!"** Our Father delights when we delight in who He is and what He's given.

Discussion Questions:

- Do you struggle to simply receive the gift of salvation Jesus has won for you? If so, how?
- As exiles in the world, it's so easy to focus on what we wish was different or on focusing on what we want or need from God. How can we develop a heart of thankfulness and delight in the Lord? How will you incorporate the discipline of praise into your life this week?

EVALUATION

How do students know if they are understanding the text? How does the teacher know if they are understanding it?

Suggestion A

The word "hallelujah" is a central theme in Book 5.

Discussion Questions:

- What does the word "hallelujah" mean?
- Where does it appear next after Book 5 in the Psalms?

Suggestion B

Psalm 150 is the climactic finish to Book 5 and the entire psalter.

Discussion Question:

- What does Psalm 150:6 say?

Psalms

CONCLUSION

Suggestions to wrap up and reinforce Lesson Thesis and Main Points 1 and 2.

What do students need to walk away with? What do they need to know to dig into next week's text?

We have learned today that **God always fulfills His promises and purposes**. He promised redemption and restoration to the exiles, and He fulfilled that promise. He promises us that He will return and take us to our true home. **God will restore all things**. When we think of how good God has been, is, and will be, we cannot help but break out into song. It's fitting that Psalm 150 says, "**Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!**"

This week, you'll study songs that gave voice to this restoration that the exiles experienced. Look for the songs of ascent that the people sang as they traveled home to Jerusalem and to the temple. You'll also get a chance to write your own song of praise. It's a fitting conclusion to the book of Psalms as we anticipate our own homegoing.

Pray to close the class.

Student Workbook Snapshot for the Following Week

Day	Text	Tools Taught
Introduction	Themes: Restoration, Blessings, Hallelujah	
Day 1	Psalm 110	Imagery, Allusion, Cross Reference
Day 2	Psalm 111	Repetition, Inclusio
Day 3	Psalm 127	Simile, Parallelism
Day 4	Psalm 137	Allusion, Cross Reference
Day 5	Psalm 147	Structure
Day 6	Challenge: A Hallelujah Song	

Psalms

Lesson 7: Recap

Lesson 7 Thesis

Psalms Thesis: The Psalms draw us into God's story and give voice to our own.

Lesson 5 Thesis: The Psalms draw us into God's story and give voice to our own.

Thesis Summary: The beauty of God's story reveals the beauty of our own, even its lowest moments, for everything it proclaims sings the story of His redeeming love for us. As we take in the Psalms, we find lyrics for our own life of faith and are pointed to Jesus as the center of it all. **The Psalms draw us into God's story and give voice to our own.**

Lesson 7 Outline Guide

INTRODUCTION

Teaching Tip: Since this lesson will be a recap of the entire study, you do not need to do a short recap at the top of the lesson.

Lesson ENGAGE: Introduction and Hook Suggestions (include Lesson Thesis)

How will students be drawn in and understand why the main points are important?

Suggestion A

Have you ever done this at a bookstore? Have you ever picked up the book, turned to page 1, and read the first line? Of course you have! The first lines of a story are so important. They hook you. They invite you in.

According to a [MasterClass article](#) on writing the opening line of your novel:

The first lines of a novel or short story must grab the reader's attention, enticing them to continue past the first page and continue reading. The first sentence provides you with an opportunity to showcase your writing style, introduce your main character, or establish the inciting incident of your narrative. Oftentimes, potential readers will glance at the opening sentence in a bookstore or on an online sample page in order to decide if they want to buy the book in the first place, so a great opening line may be the difference between a bestselling novel and a good story that languishes in obscurity.

An opening line must draw you into the story. But opening lines aren't the only things that draw humans into bigger stories. Have you ever fallen in love? Chances are it wasn't their opening line that did the trick. Maybe it was getting to know that person. Watching them over time, and observing their character. Have you been pulled into a new adventure or interest? Was it seeing someone else do that thing that drew you in?

We've been studying the book of Psalms for six weeks. In that time, did you feel it? Did you feel the

Psalms

way the Psalms draw you in? “How happy is the one...” And with this opening line, we are hooked, eager for the next words to come. As we read, we lean in and experience a taste of God’s story, or His redeeming love. And not only that, but as we learn the words and begin to sing along with the story, we’re better able to begin to tell our own. And that’s what the Psalms do. **The Psalms draw us into God’s story and give voice to our own.**

Suggestion B

Read aloud this excerpt from Psalms: The Traveling Songs of God’s People (student workbook):

Psalms was the ancient hymnal of God’s people. ... In speaking and singing the book of Psalms, God’s people wrote God’s words on their hearts, souls, and minds and lived out His words with their bodies.

This book remains a powerful means for worshiping God. We, like the Israelites, struggle to find words that describe our experiences. In the book of Psalms, writers reach for God through simple yet poetic language. They use imagery ... to try to express the magnitude of being human. They ponder existing in finite space and time while they contemplate the infinite nature of an eternal King. The writers wrestle with life, with sin, with enemies.

That’s what the psalms do. They write God’s words on our hearts. They help us wrestle with life and with sin. **The Psalms draw us into God’s story and give voice to our own.** That’s what we’re going to finish up our study discussing today—how **the Psalms draw us into God’s story and give voice to our own.**

Lesson EXPLORE: Activity and/or Discussion Suggestions

How can students wrestle with the topic before it is taught?

Suggestion A

Quick recall activity [*provide ¼ sheets of blank paper and pens on each table*]:

Grab a sheet of paper and number 1–5. Write down the theme word for each book within the book of Psalms that we studied. And here’s a hint: they all end in *-ation!* Raise your hand when you think you’ve got them all written down in order.

After a student has shared the five theme words in order say: Now, this part is a little harder, so you get to use all of the brains at your table for this one. Go through each theme word and talk about what that word means as it pertains to the Psalms.

Suggestion B

Discussion:

Share a time when you heard a song, saw a painting, or watched a show or movie and understood something about your own life or story more deeply.

Psalms

EXPLAIN: Main Point 1

Main Point 1: The Psalms draw us into God's story...

OBSERVATIONS and INTERPRETATIONS to support Main Point 1 from the text

What do students need to see and understand from the text?

[Note: The goal in the first part of class is to recap God's story through the five books of the Psalms we've studied.]

As we've studied the five books within the book of Psalms, we focused on one major theme for each book. Those themes are:

1. Psalms Book 1: Confrontation
2. Psalms Book 2: Communication
3. Psalms Book 3: Devastation
4. Psalms Book 4: Maturation
5. Psalms Book 5: Restoration

These five books and their themes correspond to God's big story, beginning with creation and ending with re-creation. They also line up with Israel's history.

- God promised His people a land and a king. The people receive those things through Moses and Joshua, and in David, who **confronts** numerous enemies before sitting on the throne.
- David reigns for a time and **communicates** an invitation to all nations to know and worship the LORD.
- David's descendants turn away from God, and so do the people. Eventually, the kingdom of Israel fractures, and the people experience **devastation** through division, war, famine, and exile.
- But God is not absent in those events. He remains near, a constant help. As God's people **mature** in their faith through suffering...
- ... they look forward to **restoration**, the day when God reigns in glory forevermore.
 - We just finished studying Book 5: Restoration. The final five psalms in this book (also of the entire book of Psalms) are five psalms of praise that each begin and end with "hallelujah." Which means that the book of Psalms ends—its big finale—is praise to God.

We learned about categories of psalms in our study, and two of those categories are psalms of lament and psalms of praise. Lamenting and praising are both very real parts of our own lives and the lives of God's people. As we proceeded through the book of Psalms in this study, the balance of these two types of poems shifted. Though both types of psalms exist throughout the book of Psalms, laments are heavier at the beginning, and praises are heavier at the end.

- Which means that in Book 1 when David is confronting numerous enemies, there is more lament. As Israel fractures and the people experience devastation, lament is heavier.
- But as they mature, there is more praise. And as they look forward to restoration, there is more praise. And in the final five psalms, there is *so much* praise!

ELABORATE

How can students deepen their understanding and apply it to their lives?

Psalms

Suggestion A

Watch the [Bible Project video “How to Read the Book of Psalms”](#) (5:29 min.)

Discussion Questions:

- How has our discussion today helped you to see the book of Psalms as a whole, rather than individual psalms or psalms separated into five books?
- How do the Psalms draw us into God’s story?

Suggestion B

Share the following, adapted from John Piper’s sermon [“Songs That Shape the Heart and Mind”](#):

If you read the Psalms only for doctrine, you’re not reading them for what they are. They are psalms, songs, poetry. They’re musical, and the reason human beings express truth with music and poetry is to awaken and express emotions that fit the truth.

One of the reasons the Psalms are deeply loved by so many Christians is that they give expression to an amazing array of emotions. Listen to this list of emotions I pulled together:

- Loneliness: “I am lonely and afflicted” (Psalms 25:16).
- Love: “I love you, O Lord, my strength” (Psalms 18:1).
- Awe: “Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him” (Psalms 33:8).
- Sorrow: “My life is spent with sorrow” (Psalms 31:10, ESV).
- Regret: “I am sorry for my sin” (Psalms 38:18, ESV).
- Contrition: “A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Psalms 51:17, ESV).
- Discouragement and turmoil: “Why, my soul, are you so dejected? Why are you in such turmoil?” (Psalms 42:5)?
- Shame: “Shame has covered my face” (Psalms 44:15).
- Exultation: “In your salvation how greatly he exults” (Psalms 21:1, ESV).
- Marveling: “This came from the LORD; it is wondrous in our sight.” (Psalms 118:23).
- Delight: “His delight is in the LORD’s instruction” (Psalms 1:2).
- Joy: “You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and new wine abound” (Psalms 4:7).
- Gladness: “I will be glad and exult in you” (Psalms 9:2, ESV).
- Fear: “I sought the LORD, and he answered me and rescued me from all my fears” (Psalm 34:4).
- Anger: “Be angry, and do not sin” (Psalms 4:4).
- Peace: “I will both lie down and sleep in peace” (Psalms 4:8).
- Grief: “My eyes are swollen from grief” (Psalms 6:7).
- Desire: “O Lord, you have heard the desire of the humble” (Psalms 10:17).
- Hope: “Let your faithful love rest on us, LORD, for we put our hope in you” (Psalms 33:22).
- Brokenheartedness: “The Lord is near the brokenhearted; he saves those crushed in spirit” (Psalms 34:18).
- Gratitude: “I will thank you in the great congregation” (Psalms 35:18, ESV).
- Zeal: “Zeal for your house has consumed me” (Psalms 69:9).
- Pain: “I am afflicted and in pain” (Psalms 69:29, ESV).
- Confidence: “Though a war breaks out against me, I will still be confident” (Psalms 27:3).

Psalms

More explicitly than all the other books in the Bible, the Psalms are designed to awaken and shape our emotions in line with the instruction they give. What happens when you read and sing the Psalms the way they are intended to be read and sung is that your emotions and your mind are shaped by these psalms.

Discussion Question:

Provide students with the list of emotions and verses from Piper's sermon.

- Look at the list of emotions present in the Psalms. Which three emotions do you experience most? Which three emotions do you experience least?
- How does seeing all of these emotions represented affect the way you view the book of Psalms?

EVALUATION

How do students know if they are understanding the text? How does the teacher know if they are understanding it?

Suggestion A

Weekly Challenge Showcase — *Invite students to share what they created in their Weekly Challenge activities. (Be sure to ask students to bring these items to the last class, if they would like to share.) The sharing can be done at tables, as a large group, or both. Be prepared, as the teacher, to go first in this. Have fun, and celebrate how God has moved in the hearts and lives of students through these enrichment activities!*

- *The Hallelujah Song, Lament, Scripture Memorization are the most straightforward to “present” in this format. The Traveling Song playlist would be time-consuming to share song-by-song, and it may not be impactful to share simply a list of songs, but students could certainly share their lists through Spotify or Apple Music with their table groups.*

Discussion Questions:

Weekly Challenge Discussion — Let's talk about the Weekly Challenge prompts from this study. It is not likely that you completed all of them, although kudos to you if you did! But hopefully you attempted at least one of them. Share that experience with your table group.

- Share one of the Weekly Challenge prompts that you attempted. How did it help you to understand the book of Psalms better? How did it bring you closer to God?

Suggestion B

Who remembers and can share the Main Point of today's lesson? (Answer: ***The Psalms draw us into God's story and give voice to our own.***)

TRANSITION: Connect Main Point 1 discussion to introduction of Main Point 2.

The Psalms draw us into God's story and give voice to our own. We've seen how **the Psalms draw**

Psalms

us into God's story, and now let's hit the second part of that main idea for this final class by seeing how the psalms also **give voice to our own**.

EXPLAIN: Main Point 2

Main Point 2: ... and give voice to our own. (Say-so)

OBSERVATIONS and INTERPRETATIONS to support Main Point 2 from the text

What do students need to see and understand from the text?

[Note: This isn't really an EXPLAIN. It's more of an EVALUATE or CONCLUSION. But this activity is included here, as the say-so is intended to fill a large chunk of class time and be the second main focus of this final class.]

Have students share a key take-away from the study of the book of Psalms as a whole. Follow the model of Psalm 107:2 that says, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so," and invite a time of sharing words of praise to God (the "say-so") in light of our redemption and what He has revealed of Himself through this study.

Leave an ample amount of time for this activity. It should begin as a table discussion first, then ask some volunteers to share with the whole class so everyone can be blessed by the answers. If necessary, some guiding questions are as follows:

- What is a key take-away from your study of Psalms?
- How has this helped you to grow in your faith and your love for the Lord?
- How does what the Lord has revealed point you to Jesus?

ELABORATE

How can students deepen their understanding and apply it to their lives?

Suggestion A

Worship Response:

Invite a worship leader or worship resident to come and lead the class in 1–2 worship songs. Ideally this would be a simple arrangement with just a guitar or piano and the worship songs would be based on the psalms.

Suggestion B

Psalm 136 Read and Respond:

Read Psalm 136 aloud with the class. Project the psalm on the screen (in sections) or have it printed on the tables. The teacher should read the first line of every verse, and the class should respond with the second line: "His faithful love endures forever."

Psalms

EVALUATION

How do students know if they are understanding the text? How does the teacher know if they are understanding it?

End-of-class Survey

Use at least 10 minutes of this final class to allow students to complete the post-class survey (link and QR code will be provided to you before this final class). Encourage students to be explicit in sharing how God used the overall study to impact their lives. This can either be done right before the Say-So (which would give students the opportunity to think about what they will then share) or after the Say-So.

CONCLUSION

Suggestions to wrap up and reinforce Lesson Thesis and Main Points 1 and 2

What do students need to walk away with?

Depending on how you choose to structure the second half of class, it may be best to end class with worship or with the Psalm 136 reading. Other ideas for ways to close out this final class are:

- Ideas for students about what to study in God's Word next
- Suggesting taking inspiration from some of the Weekly Challenge examples shown and doing their own
- Sharing your gratitude for this class and the ways they persevered through this study
- Praying to close out the class



Teaching Well

Qualities of Effective Lessons

What are the Qualities of an Effective Lesson?

Every lesson should not only have the right structural and instructional elements, but it should also ensure those elements are implemented in a way that can help others learn best. If all the right pieces of the lesson are in place but they are not also presented in a way that is clear, compelling, and true, the effectiveness of the lesson will suffer. Below are questions to consider as you are evaluating the qualities of your teaching as being clear, compelling, and true:

CLEAR

- Is the main point evident and easy to identify?
- Do the sub points, activities, discussions, imagery, and/or stories support the main point?
- Is there a logical and easy to follow flow within this lesson?
- Is there a good use of transitions and signposting throughout the lesson?
- Is the language accessible and considerate of the audience?

COMPELLING

- Does the lesson address the whole person (head, heart, hands)?
- Is the lesson relevant to the audience?
- Is there an engaging hook/conclusion?
- Is there a clear path to application for the audience?
- Are there any delivery constraints or distractions?
- Are there opportunities for discovery and exploration built into this lesson?

TRUE

- Is the main point (and sub points) supported in the Scripture acting as Subject Matter?
- Is Jesus at the center of this lesson?
- Are the texts accurately interpreted?
- Is there precision in the explanation?
- Does it address common misconceptions if they exist?
- Are the points from this lesson contradicted by other passages of Scripture?



The 5 Es

Essential Elements of Effective Teaching

Where Do the 5Es Come From?

The 5E Inquiry-Based Instructional Model is based upon cognitive psychology, constructivist theory to learning, and best practices in STEM instruction (Bybee and Landes 1990). The 5E learning cycle leads students through five phases: Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate. The 5E Instructional Model brings coherence to different teaching strategies, provides connections among educational activities, and helps science teachers make decisions about interactions with students (BSCS 2019). Compared to traditional teaching models, the 5E learning cycle results in greater benefits concerning students' ability for scientific inquiry (Bybee 2009).¹

What are the 5Es?

ENGAGE

Every lesson should have a moment where the teacher is meaningfully drawing the students into the lesson by helping them see why they should listen. Demonstrating importance and relevance are effective ways to show students what you are teaching matters. When this happens early in a lesson, it can be referred to as a 'hook'. It should also happen at the end of the lesson as well. This strong conclusion closes the lesson with power, reinforcing the weight of what they have learned. When engagement occurs at the end of a lesson, it is often referred to as 'landing the plane'.

EXPLORE

With the Explore element of your lesson the main idea is to introduce your students to an idea, question, or problem and then allow them to collaborate together on how they may approach it before your instruction. This provides the opportunity to work towards a solution without being given the answer first. This can also be referred to as discovery and can be accomplished through thoughtful activities, discussion questions, group shares, etc. Research has shown that when students are proactively pursuing the idea or problem and engaging with solutions before knowing the answer, their learning is deeper than if they were only instructed by lecture. Students can share the cognitive load in engaging with new material and provide one another with varied perspectives and insights as they work towards greater understanding.

¹ <https://knowledgequest.aasl.org/the-5-es-of-inquiry-based-learning/>





TEACHER Development Program

This element of the lesson is critical, but it is also impacted by the environment you are delivering your lesson. For instance, a classroom or a small group at home lends itself more easily to discussion and activities to explore and discover learning. However, an environment like a Sunday sermon or large group setting may not be as conducive to discussion or exploration activities. Additionally, the length of your lesson may not afford you the opportunity to utilize the Explore element as effectively. So, while this element is incredibly useful for effective teaching, it may not always be practical in every context.

EXPLAIN

This element represents what most people think of when they think of traditional teaching. With the Explain element, the teacher is instructing the students in a lecture format towards the main point of the lesson, ideally after the students have already explored on their own. If the Explore section emphasizes the students' findings about a problem or idea, the Explain section shifts to the teacher providing the solution whereby the students can see if they were on the right track.

ELABORATE

When utilizing the Elaboration element, application is the emphasis. Students are assisted in applying what they have learned to new or more specific situations in their own lives and experience. This will help them have a greater understanding of the concept or greater use of the skill they are being taught.

In teaching the Bible, we know that there is always one interpretation of the text being examined, but there can be many applications of that text in the lives of the learners. The Elaborate elements of your lesson should be where you help them see the connection between your lesson and how they are actually currently loving God and obeying Him in their everyday life. In short, it is where they apply your teaching to their own lives. They should consider how your lesson translates to how they love and live everyday.

EVALUATE

The Evaluate element provides an opportunity for students to review and reflect on their own learning. It is also a crucial time where they can demonstrate their comprehension to the teacher, which allows for adjustment and responsive reinforcement of the concepts students most need additional clarity.

Similarly to the Explore element, not every context lends itself to utilizing this tool. A classroom or discussion-centric group environment more readily allows for opportunities to stop and evaluate student comprehension. This can happen through call-and-response questions, quizzing, summary statements, reflection paragraphs, and other similar activities. The Evaluate element can also be accomplished through some large environments like Sunday services where the teaching is accompanied by a clear call to action that can measure the learner's response. Not all lessons have sufficient time to evaluate within the lesson, so this step can often happen with individual follow up or subsequent class meetings.





The 5 E's in Practice

	Definition	Examples
Engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hook (drawing students in) and/or conclusion (landing the plane)• Establishes importance and relevance• Brief	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Slido• Piccles• Comics• Movie/TV shows• News headlines• Song lyrics• Personal stories• Memory• Art• Nature facts
Explore <small>*Not suited to every context</small>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Idea, question, problem• Activates prior knowledge and “primes the pump” for engaged learning• Collaborative problem solving ahead of instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lists on papers/charts• Think/Pair/Share• Group discussion• Sorting prompts into categories• Ordering prompts by importance• Fill in the blank (and explain)
Explain	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Traditional direct instruction• Students should discover if their Explore problem-solving was on target	Direct instruction
Elaborate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Application to student’s lives• Hands component	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review bank statements and budgets• Ask a trusted friend• Commit to praying daily for a month• Sign up for a service project• Join a Sunday serving team• Join an A-Team• Ask for forgiveness• Start and end your day with thankfulness• Get baptized• Join an MC• Become a partner
Evaluate <small>*Not suited to every context</small>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review and reflect on learning• Demonstrate if learning objectives were met• Teacher can adjust subsequent lessons based on learning or learning gaps demonstrated in student responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cold calling• Call and response games (ex. Stand up = True, Sit down = False)• Exit slips• Quizzes• Summary statements• Written responses



Head, Heart, Hands Framework

At the fall, sin broke everything. Everything in the garden broke, including mankind. Everything about us broke—all of our faculties. Simply put, our head, heart, and hands broke. Our minds, instead of being fixed on the wisdom and knowledge of God, now reject it and embrace our own ability to think and reason. Our hearts, once captivated by the goodness and beauty of God, now doubt His goodness and seek to find beauty in creation rather than our Creator. Our hands, intended to serve and achieve God's calling on our lives, now work desperately to build our own kingdoms and accomplish our own agendas. But Jesus' work at the cross restored our fallen faculties to love God once again! The cross of Jesus enables us to obey the Great Commandment—to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, and strength.

As we seek to be faithful teachers, we must recognize our role in engaging these fallen faculties and do our best to help awaken them back toward God, so that the whole person can be restored in thinking, feeling, and action.

Head Learners

Students with a Head bent seek to love God primarily by using their minds to understand true things about God. They love learning, studying, and gaining more knowledge. They understand and embody the truth that you cannot love a God who you do not know. However, with Head learners there can be an assumption that because they know something, they are obeying it—that intellectually assenting to a truth means that they are living it out in their everyday lives. But we know from James 2:19 that even the demons believe true things about God and shudder. Belief does not mean obedience. Remember: **Knowledge alone is not an indication that we love God.**

Heart Learners

Students with a Heart bent seek to love God primarily through an emotional connection with Him and love God with a passion and intensity that stands out to many. They help us to see that God has powerful emotions and that truly worshipping Him involves feelings of reverence, fear, awe, joy, and love. A weakness of Heart learners is that their sense of reality and truth is often contingent upon their feelings—feeling close to God when their faith seems stable and sturdy, but when feeling far away, they can question His love for them. Truth is measured against how it makes them feel, so if they feel good about a doctrine, then it is true. But if they learn something about God that makes them uncomfortable, they may reject that truth. When we measure truth by the way we feel, it can be difficult to know whether we are worshiping the God of the Bible or a God of our own creation. Remember: **Feeling, on its own, is not an indication that we know and love the God of the Bible.**

Hands Learners

Students with a Hands bent seek to love God primarily by practicing and professing the things that God commands. These are the people actually doing the things God tells us to do—serving, living generously, forgiving others, and generally doing everything they can to obey God. They are doers of the Word, not just hearers. A weakness for Hands learners is that they can become like Martha, so busy with many things they begin to judge others for not pulling their weight. They can become distracted with tasks and miss the better portion. Unchecked, this can lead to an entitlement mentality with God, similar to the older brother in the story of the prodigal son, believing God owes them something for all their service. They can also believe they are saved because of all that they do, rather than because of all that Jesus has done. Remember: **Simply doing things for God is not an indication that we love God.**



Peer Critique

