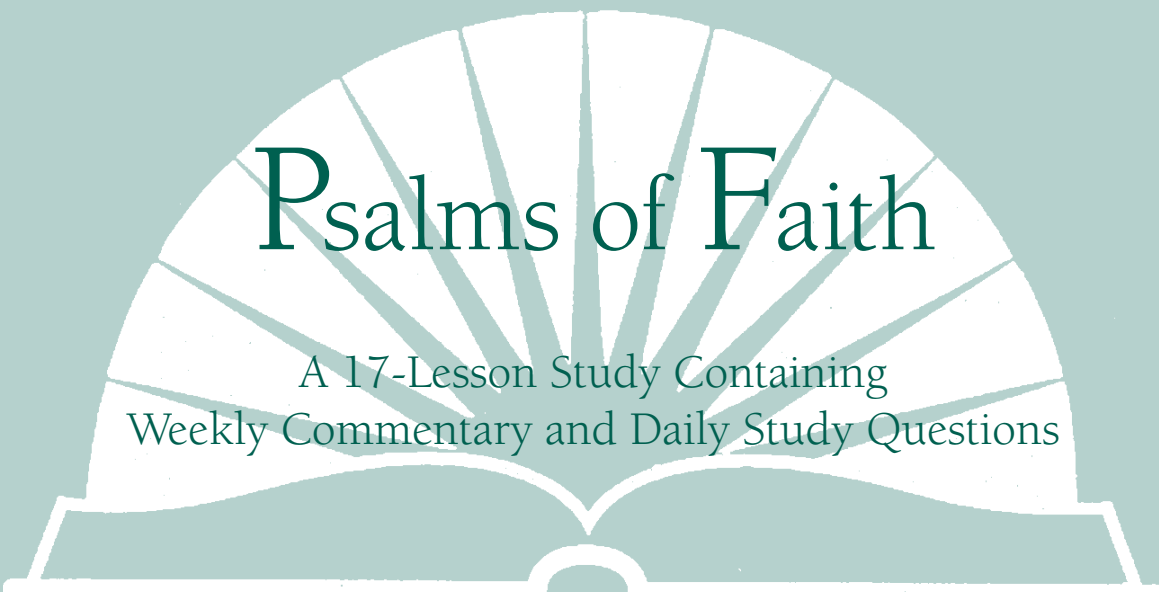


Joy of Living

Bible Studies

Enriching lives through the study of God's Word



Psalms of Faith

A 17-Lesson Study Containing
Weekly Commentary and Daily Study Questions

Commentary by

Ray C. Stedman

Daily Study Questions by

Nancy J. Collins & Kathy Rowland

Psalms of Faith

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Psalms of Faith

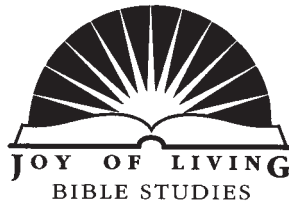
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The commentary portion of these lessons is based on a series of sermons given by Pastor Ray Stedman in 1989.

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About Joy of Living

For over 45 years Joy of Living has been effectively establishing individuals around the world in the sound, basic study of God's Word.

Evangelical and interdenominational, Joy of Living reaches across denominational and cultural barriers, enriching lives through the simple, pure truths of God's inspired Word, the Bible.

Studies are flexible, suited for both formal and informal meetings, as well as for personal study. Each lesson contains historical background, commentary and a week's worth of personal application questions, leading readers to discover fresh insights into God's Word. Courses covering many books in both the Old and New Testaments are available. Selected courses are also available in several foreign languages. Contact the Joy of Living office for details.

Joy of Living Bible Studies was founded by Doris W. Greig in 1971 and has grown to include classes in nearly every state in the Union and many foreign countries.

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How to Use Joy of Living Materials

This unique Bible study series may be used by people who know nothing about the Bible, as well as by more knowledgeable Christians. Each person is nurtured and disciplined in God's Word, and many develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as they study.

Joy of Living is based on the idea that each person needs to open the Bible and let God speak to them by His Holy Spirit, applying the Scripture's message to their needs and opportunities, their family, church, job, community, and the world at large.

Only a Bible is needed for this study series. While commentaries may be helpful, it is not recommended that people consult them as they work through the daily study questions. It is most important to allow the Holy Spirit to lead them through the Bible passage and apply it to their hearts and lives. If desired, additional commentaries may be consulted after answering the questions on a particular passage.

The first lesson of a series includes an introduction to the study, plus the first week's daily study questions. Some questions are simple, and some are deeper for those who are more advanced.¹ The individual works through the Bible passages each day, praying and asking God's guidance in applying the truth to their own life. (The next lesson will contain the commentary on the Bible passage being covered in the study questions.)

To Use in a Group Setting:

After the daily personal study of the passage has been completed, the class gathers in a small group, where they pray together and discuss what they have written in response to the questions about the passage, clarifying problem areas and getting more insight into the passage. The small group/discussion leader helps the group focus on biblical truth, and not just on personal problems. The student is the only person who sees their own answers and shares only what they feel comfortable sharing.

After small groups meet for discussion and prayer, they often gather in a large group meeting where a teacher gives a brief lecture covering the essential teaching of the Bible passage that was studied during the prior week and discussed in the small groups. The teacher may clarify the passage and challenge class members to live a more committed daily life.

At home, the student begins the next lesson, which contains commentary notes on the prior week's passage and questions on a new Scripture passage.

1. Challenge questions are optional for those who want to dig deeper or write their personal opinion. The Personal questions are between the individual doing the study and God. Those answers may be shared in class only if the individual would like to.

Do You KNOW You Have Eternal Life?

Your condition...

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

But your iniquities (sins) have separated you from your God. (Isaiah 59:2)

For the wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23)

There is help...

For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. (1 Peter 3:18)

The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

What do I do?...

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out. (Acts 3:19)

Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved. (Acts 16:31)

You CAN know...

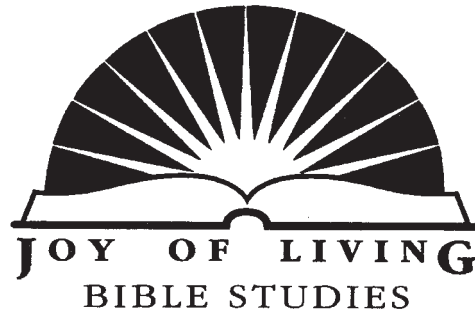
He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:12-13)

If you would like to make the decision today to repent and trust Christ as your Savior, either for the first time or as a re-commitment of your life, you may want to pray a prayer similar to this one:

Lord Jesus, I admit that I am a sinner. Please forgive my sins. Thank You for dying on the cross for me, and for coming alive again. I accept Your gifts of forgiveness and eternal life. I place my life in Your hands. I want to be Yours forever. Thank you for loving me so much. In Your Name I pray. Amen.

Psalms of Faith

Lesson 1



Preface

For centuries the Psalms have been read and loved by people from many backgrounds and viewpoints, largely because, being poetry, they speak to the heart directly. They laugh, they sing, they weep, they rail, they cry out in pain, fright, derision, joy, and the sheer delight of life. Consequently, many read them solely to find an answering spirit to their own mood.

But the Psalms are much more than poetry. Many of them bear the title *Maskil* or teaching psalm. They are thus intended to instruct the mind as well as to encourage the heart. They are designed not only to reflect a mood, but to show us also how to handle that mood; how to escape from depression, or how to balance exaltation with wisdom. This quality is the mark of their divine character. They are not merely human folk songs, reflecting the common experience of men, but they relate also the wisdom and release that ensues when a hurt or a joy is laid at the feet of God.

It was a great personal joy to me to share these studies with the responsive congregation of the Peninsula Bible Church....It is my prayer that God will use these studies to open many eyes to the beauty and help of the Psalms.

Introduction

The Psalms are particularly appropriate for our day because they relate the experiences of believers of the past, reflecting the emotional upsets, problems, and disturbances that saints of old have gone through. They are wonderful for helping us in our own emotional pressures.

There is no book like the Psalms to meet the need of the heart when it is discouraged and defeated, or when it is elated and encouraged. This book is absolutely without peer in expressing these emotional feelings. The Psalms are helpful simply because they teach us how to find our way through many types of problems. These marvelous folk songs are much like the ballad style of music that was so popular in the late '60s and early '70s, simply recounting what various men and women of the past have experienced.

Most of the Psalms were written by David. Others were written by his choir leaders in Jerusalem, and the names of Asaph, Jeduthun, Ethan, and others appearing in the Psalms are royal choirmasters. One or two were written by Moses, and one or two by King Solomon.

There are several Psalms whose authors it is impossible to identify. The whole book is a collection that has been put together by the ancient Hebrews in order that we might understand what the people of God have gone through and how they found their way out of their troubles.

The Psalms divide into five books, which are similar in theme to the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). The first book of Psalms ends with Psalm 41 and echoes the theme of Genesis, an introduction to human life and a revelation of the needs of the human heart. It is the book of foundations. The second book of Psalms begins with Psalm 42 and runs through Psalm 72. This corresponds to the book of Exodus. That is the book of redemption, the story of God's moving in human history to change and redeem people and save them from themselves.

The third book begins with Psalm 73 and goes through Psalm 89. It is like the book of Leviticus, the book in which Israel learned how to draw near to God, how to worship Him through the provision God made for His people, the tabernacle. Then Psalm 90 to Psalm 106 constitutes the fourth book, which goes along with the book of Numbers, the book of wilderness wandering, of testing and failure. Finally, the fifth book covers Psalm 107 to Psalm 150 and is like the book of Deuteronomy, the second law, i.e., the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which sets us free from the law of sin and death (see Romans 8:2). It describes the way by which God finally accomplishes the redemption and sanctification of His people, the changing of human beings into the kind of men and women He originally designed.

APPENDIX

The following is an excerpt from *What the Bible Is All About*, by Henrietta C. Mears (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1983; pp 189-194; used by permission). It provides further background on the Book of Psalms.

MAN (Psalms 1—41)

1. Man blessed (Psalm 1)
2. Man fallen from his high position and at enmity with God (Psalms 2; 14)
3. Man restored by his blessed Redeemer, the Man Christ Jesus (Psalms 16—41)

In this section we have a collection of the psalms that tell of the state of man—his blessedness, fall, and recovery. Psalm 1 tells us of the road to success. Everyone wants to prosper. No one wishes to fail. The psalmist says that everyone may prosper. Think of it! It will be well for every young person to master the rules for success laid down here.

Things Not to Do

1. Refuse to walk in the counsel of the ungodly; do not take their advice or follow the pattern of their lives.
2. Refuse to stand in the way of sinners. Standing is even a lower step. When you stand in sin, it shows that you have been brought under the spell of evil.
3. Refuse to sit—to take the scoffer's seat is to take the most despicable place possible. He sits idly watching the struggles of his fellows and cares not that many are losing the fight. You ask him, "Isn't there great need in this world?" "I suppose," he answers, but just sits and plays the cynic. He is sure "that every minister, missionary, or Christian worker is either a fool or a hypocrite."

Things to Do

1. Read the Bible.
2. Delight in it.
3. Meditate upon it.

The more you read the Word the more you want to. As one great Christian leader has said, "The gospel feeds you, then it makes you hungry." It never grows stale. You cannot read it too often or too much.

Things That Result

When the Christian has followed the don'ts and dos, what results? Three things (Psalm 1):

"Planted"—*like a tree planted* [transplanted] *by the rivers of water* —the settled and steadfast life in a luxuriant soil;

"Purposive"—*he bringeth forth his fruit in his season* —the productive life;

"Prosperous"—*his leaf also shall not wither* —the abiding, happy life.

Other psalms in this group that show the final blessings of man because of the glorious work of the Man Christ Jesus are Psalms 22; 23; 24.

Psalm 22 tells of the Good Shepherd giving His life for His sheep. We see the cross and hear the cries of our dying Saviour. As you read this psalm, you will recognize the facts.

Psalm 23 tells of the great Shepherd keeping His sheep. We read, *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want*. He promises to guide and provide and keep me.

Psalm 24 tells of the chief Shepherd in His glory rewarding His sheep. He is my King and He is coming to reign in power and great glory.

Psalm 22 gives a picture of Calvary. We see the crucifixion portrayed here more clearly than in any other part of the Old Testament. The psalm opens with the cry of our Lord in the darkest hour of His life; *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* It closes with, *He hath done this*. The original Hebrew means, *It is finished* —the last cry of the Saviour.

Psalm 22:6, *I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people*. This tells us of the offense of the cross!

Read and compare these verses:

Psalm 22:1	Matthew 27:46
Psalm 22:6-7	Luke 23:35-36
Psalm 22:6-8	Matthew 27:39,41,43
Psalm 22:12-13	Matthew 27:36,44
Psalm 22:28	1 Corinthians 15:23-24

Poured out like water ... my heart is like wax; it is melted (Psalm 22:14). This depicts excessive perspiration due to physical torture. It also means the breaking of Jesus's heart.

He tells us why His heart was broken. *Reproach hath broken my heart* (Psalm 69:20). In John 19:34-35, we read that *one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe*.

Jesus died of a broken heart. He bore the reproach and shame for others. The bearing of our sins which hid Him from His Father's face, broke His heart. Death by a broken heart is very rare. It is caused by intense agony of suffering.

My tongue cleaveth to my jaws (Psalm 22:15). This verse describes intense thirst. The account in the New Testament said, *Jesus ... that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst*. Yes, Psalm 69:21 says, *In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink*. Read John 19:28-29.

They pierced my hands and my feet (Psalm 22:16). Crucifixion! The Roman method of death by crucifixion is described here. The Jewish law did not know of this method. These words give the description of death by crucifixion—hands and feet nailed to the cross—bones of hands, arms, shoulders out of joint due to hanging from the cross, straining bone and muscle.

They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture (Psalm 22:18). Even the act of the soldiers is described here. See Matthew 27:35.

ISRAEL (Psalms 42—72)

1. Her Ruin (Psalms 42—49)
2. Her Redeemer (Psalms 50—60)
3. Her Redemption (Psalms 61—72).

Here in this section we find additional psalms compiled for use in the Temple. It opens with “a cry” from the depth of oppression—Psalms 42—49. It ends with the King reigning over the redeemed nation. *He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth* (Psalm 72:8). Read this glorious psalm.

There are several psalms of penitence, but the chief is Psalm 51. It is a psalm of David. If you turn to 2 Samuel 11 and 12, you will find the story of David’s sin. When you read this, notice three things that David said. When Nathan the prophet was telling David the story of the despicable fellow who took the only lamb belonging to the poor man, we hear him say to David: *Thou art the man*. David did not try to dodge the issue but said, *I have sinned against the LORD*. Then Nathan reassured him, saying, *The LORD also hath put away thy sin* (2 Samuel 12:13).

We think it strange when we read that David was *a man after his [God’s] own heart*. When we compare what other kings would have done under the same circumstances, we are not so surprised. But David confessed and said, *I have sinned against the Lord* (2 Samuel 12:13). That is what sin is—breaking God’s law.

You notice in the psalm these words, *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done evil in thy sight*. This psalm is a prayer of contrition and confession. David cries for mercy from a God whom he knows is merciful and full of loving kindness.

We learn from this psalm that we must confess our sin to God (1 John 1:9) and that God is just to forgive. Whenever a man is sincere in his confession to God, He will cleanse his sin.

THE SANCTUARY (Psalms 73—89)

In the psalms of this third section we see the sanctuary mentioned or referred to in almost every one. This section is concerned almost entirely with material used in worship services and needs little comment.

We see God’s counsels in relation to the sanctuary. The sanctuary is seen from its ruin to its restoration in the fullness of blessing.

THE EARTH (Psalms 90—106)

Blessing needed (Psalms 90—94)

Blessing anticipated (Psalms 95—100)

Blessing enjoyed (Psalms 101—106)

The first of this group of psalms was written during the wanderings in the wilderness. The psalms are not arranged in chronological order.

Read the opening verses of Psalms 90 and 91 together. *LORD, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty*. If God is our dwelling place on this earth, we shall live in confidence, sheltered by the Almighty. Christ says, *If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you* (John 15:7). The secret of a godly life is abiding in the Almighty. When the devil attacked Him, the Lord quoted from Psalm 91. But Christ was victorious because He lived in the place described by this same psalm. We are told that there is a point of perfect calm at the center of a cyclone. There may be raging storms, snares, pestilences, terror by night, darkness, and destruction, but when the soul is abiding under the shadow of the Almighty, it is safe.

If you wish to praise the Lord for His goodness, read Psalm 103. It is full of worship, adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. This is great exercise for the soul.

THE WORD OF GOD (Psalms 107-150)

All the teaching in the psalms is grouped around the Word of God. This section opens with Psalm 107 which gives the key: *He sent his word, and healed them*.

Psalm 119 is the great psalm of the whole book. It extols the Word of God which is the great revelation of the heart and mind of the Lord. This book is *sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb* and above *gold, yea, than much fine gold* (Psalm 19:10). Almost every verse speaks of God’s Word or law or precepts or statutes.

Value God’s Word:

1. It blesses little children—Matthew 19:14.
2. It strengthens young men—1 John 2:14.
3. It sanctifies and cleanses all who read it—Ephesians 5:26.
4. It protects the widows—Exodus 22:22-23.
5. It honors the aged—Leviticus 19:32.
6. It offers eternal life to everyone—John 3:36.

Praise is the highest duty that any creature can discharge. Man’s chief end is to glorify God. There is no heaven either here or in the

world to come for people who do not praise God. If you do not enter into the spirit and worship of heaven, the spirit and joy of heaven cannot enter you!

The Psalms begin with the word “blessed.” This word is multiplied in this book. The book seems to be built around this first word. There is not one “woe” in the entire Psalms.

How can we make the Psalms our own in experience?

Why do you like the Psalms?

What psalms can you quote?

Probably no other book has so largely influenced the turning points in men's lives, given expression to their deepest experiences, and woven itself into every fiber of their character, as the book of Psalms.

THE POSITION OF THE BOOK

Hold your Bible in your hand and turn to the middle of the book. Most often you'll open to the Psalms. Not merely is this true physically. There is a deeper truth. The Psalms are central also in human experience.

This book is used by Hebrew and Christian alike even in our day. The Psalms were for use in the Temple, for which many were prepared. They were written for the heart to worship God out under the open heavens or in the pit of despair or in a cave of hiding. When you find yourself in deep need you can always find a psalm which

expresses your inmost feeling. Or, if you have an abounding joy, the words are there for you too.

It is the book for all who are in need, the sick and suffering, the poor and needy, the prisoner and exile, the man in danger, the persecuted. It is a book for the sinner, telling him of God's great mercy and forgiveness. It is a book for the child of God, leading him into new experiences with the Lord. It tells of God's law in its perfection and pronounces blessings upon the one who will keep it.

SELECTED PSALMS IN TIMES OF NEED:

To help you make the Psalms a part of your devotional life, a place to stop and rest awhile, here is a list of where to find Psalms of:

Instruction: 1;19;39

Praise: 8;29;93;100

Thanks: 30;65;103;107;116

Repentance: 6;32;38;51;130

Trust: 3;27;31;46;56;62;86

Distress: 4;13;55;64;88

Hope: 42;63;80;84;137

History: 78;105;106

Study Questions

Before you begin each day:

- ☞ Pray and ask God to speak to you through His Holy Spirit.
- ☞ Use only the Bible for your answers.
- ☞ Write down your answers and the verses you used.
- ☞ Answer the "Challenge" questions if you have the time and want to do them.
- ☞ Share your answers to the "Personal" questions with the class only if you want to share them.

First Day: Read the Introduction to the Psalms.

1. What meaningful or new thought did you find in the notes on the Psalms, or from your teacher's lecture? What personal application did you choose to apply to your life?

2. Look for a verse in the lesson to memorize this week. Write it down and post it in a prominent place. Make a real effort to learn the verse and its "address" (reference of where it is found in the Bible).

Second Day: Read all of Psalm 1 concentrating on verse 1.

1. What three actions are we told *not* to do if we want our life to be blessed (happy)? (See Psalm 1:1.)

2.
 - a. Read Ephesians 2:1-3. When we walk according to this world who are we seeking to please?

 - b. According to Isaiah 53:6 when we choose not to follow God's "way," whose "way" are we choosing?

3.
 - a. Read Romans 8:5-8. When we choose to live according to our own sinful nature, what do we have our minds set on fulfilling?

 - b. What attitude does the sinful mind have toward God? (See Romans 8:7.)

 - c. How does God feel about this "sinful nature"? (Romans 8:8)

4.
 - a. Read Ephesians 2:4-5. According to these verses what will God do for us? Why will He do this? Try adding your name as you write these verses if you wish.

- b. Read Ephesians 2:8-9. How does He accomplish this?
5.
 - a. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17,18. When we are in Christ what type of creation are we? What happens to our old nature?
 - b. What happens to our relationship with God?
6. Personal: Read John 3:16. Have you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ to save you from your sins, reconcile you to God, and give you a new nature and eternal life? If not, why not take a moment and do it now? If you have, write a brief thank you prayer to God.

Third Day: Read all of Psalm 1 concentrating on verse 2.

1. What is our attitude and focus to be if we wish to be blessed, according to Psalm 1:2?
2.
 - a. Read 2 Peter 1:2-4. How do we obtain grace and peace? (See verse 2.)
 - b. Personal: Have you found His grace and peace? If so, share how you have experienced this in your life.
 - c. How does God's divine power give us what we need to live a godly life? (See 2 Peter 1:3.) What does God do for us through the promises in His Word? (See 2 Peter 1:4)
3.
 - a. In 2 Peter 3:18 what are we told to grow in?
 - b. In 1 Peter 2:2 what are we told to do to accomplish this growth?
4. Read 2 Timothy 3:16. Where does Scripture originate? List some of the things Scripture is useful for.
5. Challenge: Read Colossians 3:16. In your own words write what it means to have the "Word of God dwell in you." If you wish, look up the word "dwell" in your dictionary.
6. Read Romans 12:2a. What happens to us as our minds are renewed by God's Word?

Fourth Day: Read all of Psalm 1 concentrating on verse 3.

1. What is the result of God's blessing according to Psalm 1:3?

2. What is the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23?

3. Challenge: Read Mark 4:14-20. What is the seed that is being sown? (See verse 14.) What happened to the seed that was sown on good ground? (See verse 20.)

4. a. Challenge: Read Mark 4:23-25. In verses 23-24 if we hear and act upon what God says what will be given to us?

b. What happens to those who hear God's Word but don't act upon what they've heard? (See Mark 4:25.)

5. a. Read John 15:5-8. In verse 5 what is necessary for us to bring forth fruit? Try adding your name as you write this verse.

b. In verse 7 what does Jesus say that He wants to have remain in us?

c. Who is glorified when we bear fruit? (See John 15:8.)

6. Personal: Write a brief prayer expressing to God your desire to be fruitful and bring Him glory.

Fifth Day: Read all of Psalm 1 concentrating on verses 4-5.

1. According to Psalm 1:4-5, does the wicked person bear spiritual fruit? What will happen to them?

2. According to 2 Corinthians 5:10 where will all believers appear?

3. Challenge: Read 1 Corinthians 3:11-15. What will believers receive at this judgment? (See verse 14.)

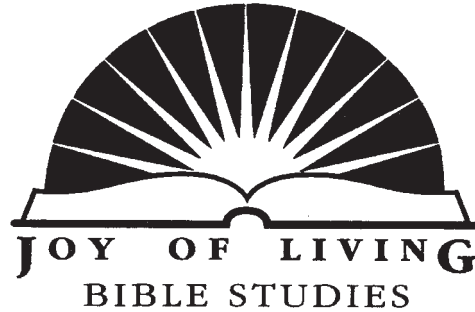
4. Read Revelation 20:11-15. Those who have *not* put their faith and trust in Christ and therefore have not had their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life will be at this judgment. According to verse 15 where will those whose names are *not* written in the Book of Life be placed?
5. Personal: Have you put your trust in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, to take away your sins (see John 1:36) and write your name in His Book of Life? If not, why don't you take a moment to do it right now. If you have, write a thank you prayer.
6. Read 1 John 5:13. Why was this written to those who believe? This would be a good verse to memorize.

Sixth Day: Read all of Psalm 1 concentrating on verse 6.

1. What promise and warning do you find in Psalm 1:6?
2. Read Proverbs 3:5-6. As we trust in the Lord what has He promised to do? Try adding your name as you write this.
3. Read Psalm 37:23-24 and Psalm 36:12. Describe the difference between the path of the righteous and the unrighteous.
4. Challenge: Read Psalm 23:1-4. Who leads and guides us? List some of the paths and places He leads.
5. According to Psalm 48:14 and Hebrews 13:5 how long will He guide us?
6. Share your memory verse with someone and tell them what it has meant to you.

Psalms of Faith

Lesson 2



Psalm 1—A Song of Foundations

Psalms 1 to 41 make up the first book of Psalms that parallels the first book of the Pentateuch, Genesis. This first book of Psalms records the beginnings of life and the basic needs of the human heart. Psalm 1 is a description of the wicked and the righteous. It describes both the God-centered life and the self-centered life.

When the psalm talks about the wicked it is not referring to murderers, rapists, or drug dealers, the kind of people we usually think of as wicked. We often think of some notorious person, such as a gangster or hoodlum, as being wicked. But the psalmist does not mean that.

The term really means the ungodly, the one who has little or no time for God in his life; someone who has ruled God out of his affairs and his thinking. God is the greatest Being in the universe, the One who makes sense out of life, the One around whom all of life revolves. To eliminate such a Being from one's thinking is to be wicked, or to be ungodly. But in contrast, the God-centered life is set before us, and the results that come from godliness. That is the simplest division of the psalm: two balanced parts.

The God-Centered Life

Look at what is said about the God-centered life. The psalmist cries out:

*Blessed is the man who walks not
in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.* (Psalm 1:1,2)

That is a description of a life centered in God. Quite appropriately it begins with the word *happy*. In many versions the word is *blessed*, but *blessed* is one of those code words that only Christians use—it really means happy. Here, then, we have the secret of happiness.

You may recognize that word as the way the Lord Jesus began the greatest sermon ever uttered before men, the Sermon on the Mount. It begins with what we call the Beatitudes (another code word, which means “the Blessings”). These Beatitudes are the secret of blessing or happiness. So here in Psalm 1 the psalmist is giving us the

clue to happiness. “Oh the blessedness,” he says, “oh the happiness of the man who lives like this.”

Walking, Standing, Sitting

Then he gives us a description of this man's life, both negatively—actions he doesn't take—and positively—actions he does take. First is the negative: “who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.” He gathers up in three key words the varied aspects of life: who walks...who stands...who sits.

Notice also the progress of evil. He speaks of the wicked, of sinners, and of the scoffers. The psalmist is pointing out to us that the ungodly are characterized by a totally different way of life, which progresses from bad to worse.

To walk is a reference to the decisions that must be made all day long. We all know how it is. We take steps throughout each day, making decisions about all kinds of matters. Walking is taking a series of steps.

To stand is a picture of the commitments we make to various causes. We give ourselves to certain things, we take our stand upon certain important matters.

To sit is a picture of the settled attitude of the heart, the continuous disposition of a person's life.

Now, says the psalmist, the man who has found the secret of happiness can be recognized by the fact that he does not walk in the way of the wicked, i.e., he does not make decisions as do the ungodly. He has rejected the philosophy of the ungodly. What is that philosophy? Perhaps it can be put into three simple propositions: “Me first”; “Get it now”; “Nothing bad will happen.” That is the counsel of the ungodly, the wicked. The man who has learned the secret of happiness rejects that. He does not make his decisions on that basis.

Second, he does not stand in the way of sinners. This word *sinners* is most interesting in the Hebrew. It is a word that means “to make a loud noise” or “to cause a tumult.” It is the idea of provoking a riot, of creating a disturbance, making trouble. The psalmist says you can recognize the godly man in that he does not make trouble. He does not provoke riots, he is not at work causing disturbances; he is obedient to the laws of life and of the land. He does not “stand in the way of” (does not identify with) those who live to cause trouble. He has rejected all that.

Third, he does not sit in the seat of the scornful, of those who blame everyone but themselves for what is wrong. We all know how easily that kind of attitude comes to our heart. If anything goes wrong, somebody else is always at fault, right? Parents blame the children, the children blame the parents, and they both blame the schools. The schools blame the parents and the government. One nation blames another nation. Everyone is blaming everyone else. That is the philosophy of the world, is it not? These are the scornful, the scoffers, the cynics, who cast a baleful eye at life in general and blame others for their problems.

A Positive Description

The godly man has rejected that attitude. On the contrary, his life is characterized by positive things. He is selfless in his motivations, obedient in his actions, obedient to law, and he does not adopt the role of the critic, but is cheerful and acceptant of whatever comes as coming from the hand of God. I love that description of a Christian, "A Christian is one who is completely fearless, continually cheerful, and constantly in trouble." This is exactly what the psalmist describes. It is an unusual life. I think most of us, hearing this, say to ourselves, "Do I meet that description?"

But that is the negative side. Now look at the positive side. "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:2). Here is the reason why this man is able to reject the world's philosophy. He has learned to delight in the law of the Lord. Now "the law of the Lord" is, in the Psalms, another name for the Scriptures. It means more than the Law of Moses; it includes the whole revelation of God. This godly person has learned that in the book of God he is given a completely different view of life than what he gets from the world.

In the book he is told the truth about life. He has learned to delight in this book, which tells him the truth and shows him a whole new way of life.

Discovering Truth and Appropriating Power

If this were the only description of the godly man, one might infer that this man thinks too much of himself; that he does not act like others because he thinks he is better than they are. But this second verse makes clear that this is not the reason why he lives the way he does. It is because he has discovered the truth about himself out of the law of God.

One Sunday morning a minister read the following verses from 1 Corinthians 6 to his congregation. "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Then he said to the congregation, "Now that is a description of the Christians in Corinth and the life they once had led. I would like to ask if there are any here who have had this kind of a background. How

many in this congregation have done some of the things listed here?" He read the list again, "Immoral, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, drunkards, greedy, revilers, and robbers." One by one, all over the congregation people began to stand to their feet until more than half the congregation was standing.

A young man was visiting the church for the first time that morning. He had recently become a Christian and had attended several churches looking for a fellowship where he could feel at home. He took one look at this great crowd and said, "These are my kind of people."

Yes, "Such were some of you. But you are washed, you are sanctified (made clean), you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ by the Spirit of our God." That is what the man of the first Psalm discovers when he reads the law of God. He learns not only that God demands a certain perfection, but also how that perfection is made possible through the Redeemer whom God will send, whose life he learns to share. By faith, he learns to appropriate the strength of that coming Lord.

He meditates on the law day and night. That does not mean he goes around thinking about Scriptures and repeating them over and over all day long. That is a mechanical understanding of this verse. Rather, this man has learned a wonderful new life made possible by God and available for any situation. He keeps appropriating it all day and all night, whenever he needs it.

He does not attempt to mobilize his human resources or to find some kind of encouragement from outsiders and thus to depend upon external circumstances for peace and rest; he learns to draw only upon the strength of God. This is the secret of the godly life. This is the only way any of us can learn to be selfless, obedient, and cheerful under every circumstance.

A "Deep-Rooted" Life

Now the psalmist goes on to give us the evaluation of this kind of life,

*He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers. (Psalm 1:3)*

Many years ago when I was first beginning my ministry, we held a youth conference in the Sierra Nevada. There a young man came to me and took me aside. We stood together underneath a great Douglas fir and he said, "Pastor, I don't know what is the matter with me. I want to be a good Christian, and I try hard, but somehow I just never seem to make it. I'm always doing the wrong thing. I just can't live like a Christian."

I said to him, "Well, there may be several reasons for that, but let me ask you this: What about your private life with the Lord? How well do you know the Lord? How much do you delight in reading His Word and then spending time talking to Him? Because, after all, it's not the

time spent in reading the Word that's important, but it's the time spent in enjoying the presence of God that strengthens you."

He hung his head and said, "Well, I admit I don't do very much of that."

Just then this very phrase from the Psalms flashed into my mind, "He shall be like a tree planted by rivers of water." I stepped back and said to him, "Look at this tree we're under. What does it remind you of? What are the qualities this tree suggests to you?"

He looked at the great Douglas fir, towering into the heavens above, and said, "Well, the first thing is, it's strong."

I said, "Yes. Anything else?"

"Well," he said, "it's beautiful."

Finding Beauty and Strength

I said, "Exactly! Beauty and strength. Those are the two things you admire about this tree. And those are exactly the two things you want in your own life, aren't they? Beauty and strength?"

He said, "Right."

"Well," I said, "tell me this: What makes this tree beautiful and strong? Where does it get its beauty and its strength?"

He stopped for a moment and looked at the tree, then he said, "Well, from the roots, I guess."

I asked him, "Can you see the roots?"

"No," he said, "you can't." Then he said, "I get it! That is the hidden part of life, but it is the secret of this tree's beauty and strength, isn't it?"

That is what this psalmist is saying. The man who is godly has learned, in the hidden inner parts of his life, to draw upon the grace and glory and strength of God. His roots run deep into rich and moist soil, and this is what makes him beautiful and strong. He is like a tree planted by rivers of water.

Bringing Forth Fruit

And he is fruitful. "He brings forth fruit in its season." That is probably a reference to the fruit of the Spirit, which is described in the New Testament. It is the character of God which is always the same in either the Old or the New Testament: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control.

"Its leaf does not wither." That means he is always vital, always an exciting kind of person. He is never dull, never dreary, never boring; he is an exciting, vital person because he is in touch with a vital God. Finally, all that he does prospers; he is effective. What he puts his hand to he accomplishes because he is not doing it in his own strength but in the strength of another, a hidden Other, from whose resources he is continuously drawing.

That, you see, is the godly life. The man who learns to live that way is a happy person. It does not make any difference what his outward circumstances may be, because happiness does not consist in

the abundance of things that you possess, as Jesus tells us. This man is happy because he has learned the true secret of happiness. "In all that he does, he will prosper." That is God's promise.

The Ungodly Life

Now, more briefly, in contrast to this he describes the man who has no time for God.

*The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff
which the wind drives away. (Psalm 1:4)*

It takes two verses to describe the secret of the godly life; it only takes two words to describe the life of the ungodly: "not so." Everything that is said about the godly is "not so" for the ungodly. They believe in the philosophy of the world, the counsel of the ungodly. (Me first; Get it now; Nothing bad will happen.) They are involved in small or large acts of rebellion. They violate the fundamental laws of life, yet they blame everyone else for their troubles. "The ungodly are *not so*," not like the godly, "but," and here is the evaluation of their life, "are like the chaff which the wind drives away."

A Worthless Existence

I do not think city folks understand chaff. In Montana every fall we had harvesters who came around with a threshing rig. The bundles of wheat would be thrown into this machine. The straw would be blown out onto the stack and the wheat would come dribbling out to be poured into trucks or wagons and taken away to the granary. But floating around in the air everywhere was chaff. It was the "awfullest stuff" you ever saw. It stuck to the skin wherever you were sweating—on the back of your neck and down your shirt. It created frightful itching. It was universally regarded as totally worthless.

Clear back in the psalmist's day, 1,000 years before Christ, the only thing they could think of to do with chaff was to let the wind blow it away. And still, 2,000 years after Christ, the only thing we can do with chaff is to blow it away. The threshing rig tries to blow it up onto the straw stack and get it out of the way, for it has no value at all.

And that is God's evaluation of the life that has no room for Him. It is like chaff. Oh, it may be very impressive in the eyes of the world. Such a man may have a beautiful home, drive several big cars, have many luxuries, and be regarded as a big wheel. But in God's evaluation, his life is worthless and he's only going around in circles. He has never fulfilled a single purpose for which God put him in this world. His life is so much wasted time as far as God is concerned. It is worthless, like the chaff that the wind drives away.

No Standing Before God

As a result, there are two things said of him "*He shall not stand in the judgment.*" That means the daily judgment of God, the evaluation that God constantly makes of our lives. This man has no standing in that at all. Everything he does is so much wasted labor. Nor will he be "*in the congregation of the righteous*" (Psalm 1:5). That is a reference

to the final judgment. When all the redeemed are gathered together, this man will be absent. He may even have been religious. I rather think he was. But, you remember, Jesus said that, "Many shall say in that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? And did we not do many mighty works and cast out demons in your name?'" And he shall say, "Depart from me, I never knew you" (see Matthew 7:22,23). *I never* knew you. This man shall not stand in the congregation of the righteous because he has never put God at the center of his life.

A Contrast of Good and Evil

Then the psalm concludes with a tremendous word of explanation. Why does all this happen in this way? Why is it that, though outwardly a man's life may be very impressive, inwardly it may be nothing but a hollow shell, empty and worthless? The answer is, "*The Lord knows the way of the righteous*" (Psalm 1:6). The Lord knows that path, He is watching over that man, guiding him, guarding him, and keeping him (or her). "But the way of the wicked (the ungodly) will perish" (Psalm 1:6). That means it will dribble out into nothing. "His lamp will be put out in utter darkness," says the proverb, a tremendous phrase (Proverbs 20:20).

This has never been demonstrated more strikingly than in the days of the New Testament. There came a time when the apostle Paul stood as a prisoner before Nero Caesar. Nero was at that time a most dissolute, vain, cruel, inhuman, implacable monster. He is regarded now by historians as one of the most vile and contemptible rulers ever to sit upon a throne. He even commanded that the body of his own

mother be ripped apart that he might see the womb that had borne him. He once saw a handsome young man in his court and he ordered him castrated and then sexually abused him the rest of his life. Yet Nero's name was known all over the empire. He was Caesar. The whole of the Roman world bowed to his will. The life of that mighty empire revolved around this man, Nero Caesar.

Then there stood before him this obscure little Jew, Paul the apostle, from a despised Roman province. No one knew him. He had scarcely been heard of except in a few isolated places where he had caused certain troubles. He was a prisoner in chains, standing before this mighty emperor. Yet, as it has been often pointed out, today we name our sons Paul, and our dogs, Nero. "The Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish."

Father, we cannot read these words without asking ourselves the question: Have we discovered the secret of happiness? Are we allowing this marvelous provision for producing godlikeness to be at work in us? Or does a great deal of our life still consist of ungodliness so that we are like the chaff the wind drives away? Are great areas of our life worthless and wasted because we are living on the principles and precepts of the world around us?

Lord, thank you for having come to teach us the way of godliness, and to show us how your life can be manifest in us. We pray that you will help us to lay hold more fully of this life, that our lives, in the Day of Judgment, will find value; that we shall stand in the congregation of the righteous; that we may live the remaining years of our life, under your eye, in your loving care. This we ask in your name, Amen.

Study Questions

Before you begin each day:

- ☛ Pray and ask God to speak to you through His Holy Spirit.
- ☛ Use only the Bible for your answers.
- ☛ Write down your answers and the verses you used.
- ☛ Answer the "Challenge" questions if you have the time and want to do them.
- ☛ Share your answers to the "Personal" questions with the class only if you want to share them.

First Day: Read the Commentary on Psalm 1.

1. What meaningful or new thought did you find in the notes on the Psalm 1, or from your teacher's lecture? What personal application did you choose to apply to your life?

2. Look for a verse in the lesson to memorize this week. Write it down and post it in a prominent place. Make a real effort to learn the verse and its "address" (reference of where it is found in the Bible).

Second Day: Read all of Psalm 8 concentrating on verse 1.

1. Write Psalm 8:1 in your own words.

2. Who does God say that He is in Exodus 3:13-15?

3. In scripture names often describe the character of the one named. In Exodus 34:5-7 how does God describe His name and character?

4. In Psalm 9:10 what will those who know God's name do and why?

5.
 - a. What does Philippians 2:9-11 tell us about Jesus' name?

 - b. Challenge: In Revelation 5:9-10 why is Jesus worthy to receive praise?

6. Personal: Write several reasons you have to praise God. Try writing your praise in a prayer to your Savior.

Fourth Day: Read all of Psalm 8 concentrating on verse 3.

1. According to Psalm 8:3 what did God create?
2. How were the heavens and earth formed?
Genesis 1:1

Jeremiah 10:12

Revelation 4:11
3. Challenge: Read the following verses to discover how God created each aspect of the world.

Genesis 1:3	Genesis 1:14
Genesis 1:6	Genesis 1:20
Genesis 1:9	Genesis 1:24
Genesis 1:11	

4. a. Read John 1:1. Who was in the beginning?

b. In John 1:3 what was made through the Word?

c. Read John 1:14. Who is the Word?
5. Read Colossians 1:13-17. Write verse 15—17 inserting the name of Jesus, whom Paul is writing about.
6. Personal: Re-read Colossians 1:13-14. Today we have focused on God's mighty power in creating the entire universe, and yet He loves each one of us so much that he sent His Son Jesus to save us from our sins. What does this knowledge mean to you?

Fifth Day: Read all of Psalm 8 concentrating on verse 4.

1. Realizing God's great glory and majesty what question comes to David's mind in Psalm 8:4?
2. a. In Genesis 1:20,24 we saw God speak and living creatures were created (see Fourth Day, Question 3). What is different about the creation of man in Genesis 2:7?

b. Whose breath did Adam have (Genesis 2:7)?

c. Read Genesis 1:27. In whose image is mankind made?
3. In Genesis 2:16-17 what warning does God give to Adam?
4. a. Challenge: Read Genesis 3, the Biblical account of the Fall of man. Describe what happened to creation in Genesis 3:17-19 because of Adam's and Eve's disobedience.

b. Read Genesis 3:22-23. Why did God expel Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden?
5. In Romans 5:12 what entered the world through Adam?

6. Personal: In John 3:16 we see how special we are to God. He did not want to leave us under the power of sin and death. Do you realize how special you are to God? Write John 3:16, inserting your name in the verse.

Sixth Day: Read all of Psalm 8 concentrating on verses 5-9.

1. According to Psalm 8:6-8 what has God made mankind ruler over?

2. a. Challenge: Read Hebrews 2:6-11. The author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 8:4-6 in Hebrews 2:6-7. In Hebrews 2:8 are all things currently subject to mankind?

- b. In Hebrews 2:9 why was Jesus crowned with glory and honor?

- c. In Hebrews 2:11 what does Jesus call those who believe?

- 3. Read Romans 8:16. What does the Holy Spirit testify?

- 4. a. According to Romans 8:19 what is all of creation waiting for?

- b. Read 1 John 3:2. Who will we be like when God's plan is fulfilled?

- 5. Read Romans 8:20-21. What is the hope for creation?

- 6. a. Read Revelation 21:3-5, a glorious picture of the future when Jesus returns. Where will God dwell? (See verse 3)

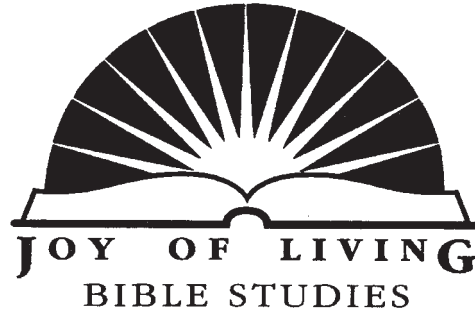
- b. What changes will take place? (See verse 4.)

- c. What will be made new? (See verse 5.)

- 7. Personal: Read John 1:12. Have you received Jesus Christ as your savior? Why not do it now and become a child of God? If you have done this, write a prayer of thanksgiving for the wonderful future God has planned for you.

Psalms of Faith

Lesson 3



Psalm 8—Man and God

The inscription of Psalm 8 states "To the choirmaster: according to the Gittith." The word *gittith* means a winepress but also designates a stringed instrument, which was shaped like a winepress. The Greeks took the word and the instrument that it represented and called it a *kithara*; from that comes the Spanish *guitarra* and from that the English *guitar*. We are therefore in the prophetic succession when we hear a guitar accompaniment to these psalms. They were designed to be sung to the music of a guitar.

The Majesty of God

The theme of Psalm 8 is given to us in the first and last verses,

O Lord, Our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth!
(Psalm 8:1)

It is a psalm of David and most scholars feel that it probably comes from the early part of David's ministry, reflecting his experience as a shepherd boy alone at night with his sheep on the hillsides of Judea, under the starlit heavens. There he had ample opportunity to observe the glories of God in nature. It is evident that the psalmist is greatly impressed with the being of God. This psalm sets forth what he has discovered about God that awes and inspires him. He can only express it in these beautiful words, "How majestic is thy name in all the earth!"

The Simplicity of God

Verses 2 through 8 tell us why the psalmist came to this conclusion, what it is about God that is so impressive. The first thing is rather startling. It is God's simplicity. He puts it this way:

*Thou whose glory above the heavens is chanted
by the mouths of babes and infants,
thou hast founded a bulwark because of thy foes,
to still [or silence] the enemy and the avenger.*
(Psalm 8:2)

What had impressed this man was that the transcendent glory of God, His greatness, which was far above all the heavens, could still be grasped and expressed by a child. Evidently he had often struggled to put into words the thoughts and ideas of his heart, but he found that

his rationality, his intelligence, was challenged by such an attempt. Yet here is a God who can reveal himself in such marvelous ways that children, babes, infants even, can grasp what He means. They often understand more rapidly and more thoroughly than do the intellectuals.

Out of the Mouths of Babes

The psalmist's observation is confirmed by an incident from the New Testament. In the twenty-first chapter of Matthew, the Lord Jesus quotes the words of this psalm on a certain occasion. Matthew tells us:

And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast brought perfect praise'?" (Matthew 21:14-16)

These chief priests and scribes thought that Jesus should be offended by the fact that these street urchins, ragged and dirty, were crying out, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" This was not a children's choir trained by the temple leaders. It was merely a band of ordinary children who happened to be there at the time Jesus healed the blind and the lame. But when they saw these wonderful things, the children began to cry out, "Praise be to the Son of David! Hosanna to the Son of David!" The scribes and chief priests were indignant and thought Jesus ought to silence these ragamuffins.

Instead, He said, "They are the ones who have caught the truth, they are the ones who see. They understand that here is being manifested the healing power of God. It is all right in line with the prediction of David in the eighth Psalm that God's marvelous simplicity can be conveyed to a child much more easily than it can to an adult."

Remember that the apostle Paul says much the same thing in his opening words in 1 Corinthians. He declares that God has deliberately designed life in this way. God has chosen the weak things and the things that are not to set at naught, to show up, to expose the things that are—to convey His messages through weak, foolish and obscure things. Every now and then God seems to delight in taking some poor uneducated person and using him in great power to change a nation or the world. He has the ability to convey himself to the childlike mind. The reason for this of course is because children (and those who are childlike) are filled with humility. Pride blots out truth.

Any time you approach the Scriptures, regarding them as insignificant or thinking yourself superior to their wisdom so that you must correct them or sit in judgment over them, you will find that their pages are shut to you. You will never understand them at all. But if you look at them as a child looks at life, impressed by everything and listening to everything, not thinking that he knows all the answers but simply trying to observe, then you will find the truth begins to speak volumes to you and you will understand it.

Jesus prayed on one occasion, recorded in Matthew 11:25, "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes."

Confounding the "Wise"

Now, says the psalmist, this is not only the mark of the greatness of God, but it is also that which baffles the enemy. By means of His ability to convey truth to infants, God has founded a bulwark—erected a wall—"because of your foes, in order to silence the enemy and the avenger." That expresses the idea that when God speaks through children (and childlike persons) He often baffles the rational, the intelligent. Those who pride themselves upon their wisdom are frequently routed by the insight of someone they consider quite insignificant.

It is reported that on one occasion an infidel was lecturing against God. Again and again in his lecture he stated, "There is no God!" In the back of the room listening to the lecture was a rather simple individual who was a believer in God, a Christian. He raised his hand and when the lecturer recognized him, the Christian stood up and said, "Sir, the next time you say, 'There is no God' would you mind adding, 'as far as I know.'" With keen insight he had put his finger upon the logical fallacy of that lecturer. He was trying to defend a negative absolute. It is impossible to defend such. No one can ever prove that there is no God. This uneducated person saw the error and put his finger right on it. "You are limited by your own knowledge," he is saying. "You don't know enough yet. You can't know that there is no God, so don't speak out of your ignorance."

A liberal Sunday School teacher had a class of boys. He was teaching the story of the feeding of the five thousand and said something like this: "You know, this isn't really a miracle. Jesus did no miracles. What really took place here was that when this crowd was hungry a little boy present there decided to share his lunch with Jesus. He brought his lunch to Jesus and Jesus commended him for this. When the crowd saw that, it suggested to them that if they would share the lunches they had brought everybody would have enough. So they all began to share and there was plenty for everyone. If there was a miracle at all it was a miracle of sharing." He leaned back rather satisfied with himself on having explained away the miracle. Then one little boy in his class said to him, "Sir, may I ask a question?" The teacher said, "Yes." And he said, "What did they fill the twelve baskets with afterwards?"

Thus God, in order to demonstrate His greatness, often uses children to teach truths adults will not face. Man is forever thinking that

it takes vast education and profound knowledge to reach God. But God is forever trying to tell us that, although He is certainly in favor of knowledge, for He is a God of truth and knowledge, nevertheless knowledge is not the way man finds God. He finds Him by listening with the humility of a child. That is why Jesus said, "Except you become as little children you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven" (see Matthew 18:3).

The Wisdom of God

The psalmist now turns to the second thing that has impressed him about God: His wisdom.

*When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
the moon and the stars which thou hast established,
what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man
that thou dost care for him? (Psalm 8:3,4)*

Imagine the scene. Here is young David out under the stars at night watching his sheep. Of course, the air at that time and place was not darkened with smog or polluted with the irritants that fill the air today. The stars were brilliant, and the moon, in its full phase, was crossing the heavens. He felt, as we have all felt as we stood under the stars at night, something of mingled mystery and awe as he looked up into the star-spangled heavens. He considered the beauty of nature and its silent witness to the wisdom of God. He sees the ordered procession of the stars and, watching them through the night, sees how they wheel in silent courses through the heavens. He notices the varying glory of different stars, and the evident vast distances that are visible in the heavens. All the breathtaking beauty of this scene breaks upon his eyes as the sunsets. He is astonished at the greatness of a God who could create such things.

The interesting thing is that 30 centuries after David wrote these words we feel the same impression when we consider the starry heavens. Though we are now able to go to the moon, which David could only see, yet all the knowledge that has been gained about the universe in which we live only serves to deepen our impression of the tremendous wisdom and power of God. How vast is the universe in which we live! Incredible in its extent and outreach, these vast distances are spanned only by the measurement of the speed of light—and even that is hardly adequate. These billions of galaxies whirl in their silent courses through the deepness of space. How tremendous is the power that sustains it all and keeps it operating as one harmonious unit! That is what impressed this psalmist.

The Significance of Man

Then he faces the inevitable question that comes to man whenever he contemplates God's greatness. "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?" You will recognize that this is the question that cries for an answer in our day. What is man? Where did he come from? What is his purpose here? Why does he exist on this small planet in this vast universe? Is there meaning, is there significance, is there reason for his living?

Now there are basically only two answers that are being given. A mechanistic science looks out into the universe using instruments of exploration such as the telescope and tells us that man is nothing but another creature like the animals; that he is the highest of the animals; having grown from animal stock, and that he is alone in the universe as an intelligent, rational being. There is nothing beyond the whirling stars; man is part of a great cosmic machine, which grinds on relentlessly; man is but an insignificant cog, hardly able, with the exercise of his utmost powers, to do anything at all about the universe in which he lives. The late Bertrand Russell, whom many regarded as the high priest of humanism, eloquently expressed it this way:

“The life of man is a long march through the night surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, toward a goal that few can hope to reach and where none may tarry long. One by one as they march our comrades vanish from our sight, seized by the silent orders of omnipotent death.

“Brief and powerless is man’s life. On him and all his race the slow sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way. For man, condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day.”

That philosophy is producing widespread despair in our world today. Everywhere, young men and women, boys and girls, are succumbing to an existentialist despair that says there is nothing permanent, life is futile, and we all live out our days in a hopeless tangle of meaninglessness. As Shakespeare put it, “Life is but a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” We see about us on every side violent attempts to grasp for the moment what life there is. An awful sense of frustration and meaninglessness, skyrocketing suicide rates, and dark despair are spreading a blanket of gloom across the peoples of earth as they face the growing, inexorable problems of our day.

God’s Purpose for Man

But contrast that with the biblical view of man, for the psalmist goes on to answer his own question by the revelation of the program and purpose of God for man.

*Yet thou hast made him little less than God,
and dost crown him with glory and honor.
Thou hast given him dominion
over the works of thy hands;
thou hast put all things under his feet,
all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the sea.*

(Psalm 8:5-8)

The psalmist says that God’s greatness is revealed in His purpose for man, which is two-fold. First, man has a unique relationship to God. He was made to be a little less than God himself. Some per-

haps are startled by that translation, for the King James Version says, “a little lower than the angels.” But it was the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament that used the phrase, “the angels.” The Hebrew actually says “little less than Elohim” (God).

The Expression of God

That remarkable expression is a revelation of God’s purpose for man. According to the Bible, God made man to be the expression of His life, the means by which the invisible God would be made visible to His creatures. Man is to be the instrument by which God can do His work in the world. He is the creature nearest to God. Man is such a unique being, such a remarkable creature, that God Himself intends to live in him to be the glory of man’s life. Man is the bearer of God.

What a great gulf there is between this and Bertrand Russell’s view of man! What an infinite difference! This is why God loves man—even lost man. He sees in every man and woman His own image, that which was designed for Himself, that which He made to be the bearer of His glory. Thus every person is inexpressibly important to God. God longs to reach every man, woman, boy, girl, because each is made and designed for Himself.

The Dominion of Man

But further, says the psalmist, because of that unique relationship, man is designed to be in dominion over all other things. He is to rule the animal creation and all the natural forces in the world in which he lives, and to exercise that dominion in an effective way. We read “Thou hast put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,” and we say, “Yes, that’s true because man can assert his will over the animals of the world.”

But that is not what this psalmist means. He is not talking about man’s ability to force the animal creation to obey him. What he is describing is the relationship God intended in which the animals would willingly serve man.

In Hebrews 2 the writer quotes this passage and says two very significant things. First, “We do not yet see all creation in subjection to man” (see Hebrews 2:8). That is clearly true. Here we are facing the fact that man has been so twisted and perverted by the Fall that instead of running the creation, he is ruining it. He is polluting the air and consuming natural resources at a prodigious rate. He is befouling the waters and the soil and making it almost impossible for human life to continue. We must face this. There is no way out of it. It stares us in the face every time we turn around. Each time we take a breath we experience the terrible evidence for the truth of what the writer says in Hebrews, “We do not yet see all things in subjection to man.” We find no way out.

The Fulfillment of Creation

But he also says something else. “But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death” (Hebrews 2:9). Because of the suffering of death God has crowned Him with the glory and honor that He had intended for man at the beginning. In seeing Jesus, we see that God yet intends to fulfill His original creation.

Watch the Lord Jesus in the Gospel record. The first thing He does is to change water into wine at a wedding feast. He short-circuited the process that is taking place in every vineyard in California right at this moment and thus changed water into wine. But He did not do that as God, He did it as man, man as God intended man to be. When He quieted the winds and the waves with the words, "Peace, be still," and the wind whimpered and stopped its blowing and the waves quieted down, the disciples looked at one another and said, "What manner of man is this?" (see Matthew 8:26,27). They did not realize that what He had done was not done out of His inherent deity but as a man indwelt by God. As Jesus Himself said, "It is not I who do the works; it is the Father who dwells in me, He does the works" (see John 14:10). When He broke the loaves and fishes and fed the 5,000, He did not do that as God; He did that as man—man ruling over creation, man fulfilling the intention of God for man. All the other natural miracles that He performed He did not as God but as man. Thus the writer of Hebrews says, "We see Jesus"—the beginning of a new humanity God is building.

God's New Humanity

The ultimate question we are facing here is: What is the purpose of life? What are you here for? Why do you go on making money to buy food and other things year after year? What is the reason for it all? The answer is, if you have discovered Jesus Christ, you are a part of God's new humanity. God is fulfilling His original intention for man right now. He is beginning a new humanity and He is teaching us lessons through the struggles and difficulties of life that we could never learn in any other way.

Paul says in Romans 8:22,23 that the whole creation is eagerly looking forward to the day of the manifestation of the sons of God. God is not going to be defeated by the wickedness and foolishness of man. Even though man is destroying the world in which he lives, making it a mess in which he can no longer exist, yet God will not be defeated. Amidst the increasing ravaging of nature, God is doing something.

The exciting news of today is not what is recorded in our newspaper headlines. The events that are reported in the headlines will all be entombed in some dusty old history book or buried in a trash can in

another 10 years. They will be of little significance to any living being at that time. But the exciting thing today is what is happening in the new humanity that God is creating through the trials and difficulties we are experiencing. These troubles are transforming you and me who know Jesus Christ into sons of God who are awaiting the day when the curtain is drawn back and all the world shall see what God has been working on behind the scenes. In Romans 8:18 the apostle says, "I know that the sufferings of this present time are not worth being compared with the glory that is to be revealed." In 2 Corinthians 4:17 he says, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

A Purpose to Life

There is purpose to life—if you know Jesus Christ! There is no purpose outside of Christ. There is no real reason to live if you do not know Jesus Christ. But if you know Him you are part of a new creation that God is fashioning behind the scenes within the framework of history and one of these days it will be revealed. When the curtain is drawn back, all the world—and all the universe—will sing together the words of the last verse of this psalm. *O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all earth!* (Psalm 8:9).

What a magnificent God who can work through babes and infants and who is deeply concerned about man. The one who created the heavens is concerned and compassionate toward men and ultimately will fulfill all the dreams of humanity. "O Lord, our Lord, how wonderful is thy name in all the earth!"

We bow before thee, our Father, and almost tremble because we are privileged to call you Father—such a great God, such a revelation of wisdom, greatness, power and strength and yet, *our Father, our Lord, our God.*

"That thou shouldst so delight in me
and be the God thou art;
Is darkness to my intellect
but sunshine to my heart."

(Author unknown, public domain)

Study Questions

Before you begin each day:

- ☞ Pray and ask God to speak to you through His Holy Spirit.
- ☞ Use only the Bible for your answers.
- ☞ Write down your answers and the verses you used.
- ☞ Answer the "Challenge" questions if you have the time and want to do them.
- ☞ Share your answers to the "Personal" questions with the class only if you want to share them.

First Day: Read the commentary on Psalm 8.

1. What meaningful or new thought did you find in the notes on the Psalm 8, or from your teacher's lecture? What personal application did you choose to apply to your life?
2. Look for a verse in the lesson to memorize this week. Write it down and post it in a prominent place. Make a real effort to learn the verse and its "address" (reference of where it is found in the Bible).

Second Day: Read all of Psalm 19 concentrating on verses 1-6.

1. What bears witness that there is a God? (Psalm 19:1)
2. Is there any place on the earth or are there any people who have not seen or heard this witness? (Psalm 19:3-4a)
3. a. Read Romans 1:18-22. What has been made plain to mankind? Is there an excuse for denying God? (verses 19-20)
 - b. What choice did mankind make that caused their thinking to become futile and their hearts to be darkened? (Romans 1:21)
 - c. Compare Romans 1:22 with Psalm 14:1. How does God describe the person who denies His existence?
4. In Romans 1:25 what did mankind willingly exchange, and what was the result?
5. Challenge: Today people still have the witness of Creation to God's existence, as well as the witness of God's Word, the Bible, yet many still choose to deny His existence. In what way do you see people around you serving created things rather than the Creator?
6. Personal: Have you chosen to serve some created thing? Ask Jesus Christ to forgive you and give you a new start. Read Philippians 4:13 which will encourage you.

Third Day: Read Psalm 19 concentrating on verses 7-9.

1. Write down from Psalm 19:7-9 how God's Word (His law, His statutes, His precepts) is described and what it will do.

2.
 - a. Read Romans 3:19-23 which also speaks of God's law. According to verses 19 and 23 who is guilty and accountable to God?

 - b. What does God law's bring to our knowledge according to Romans 3:20?

 - c. How do those who believe receive the righteousness of God? (Romans 3:22)

3. How do we receive this faith according to Romans 10:17?

4. How are we born again according to 1 Peter 1:23?

5. Challenge: Psalm 19:8b says God's commands give light to the eyes. In the following verses what does God's word give us light to see?

Ephesians 1:18

2 Corinthians 4:6

6. Personal: If you have received God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ, He has given many promises for your future. If you would like to, insert your name in these verses to claim His promises.

1 John 3:2

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

Psalm 16:11

Fourth Day: Read Psalm 19 concentrating on verses 10-11.

1. Compare Psalm 19:10 with Proverbs 8:10-11. Describe the value of God's Word.

2. What does our obedience to God's Word bring? (Psalm 19:11)

3. In John 14:21 what is our reward for obedience to God's Word?

4. Read Genesis 15:1. Who is Abraham's (Abram's) reward?

5. Read Philippians 3:8. Describe how the Apostle Paul feels about knowing Jesus Christ.

6. Personal: Write a prayer to God expressing how you feel about knowing Him.

Fifth Day: Read Psalm 19 concentrating on verses 12-13.

1. Compare Psalm 19:12a with Jeremiah 17:9 and Romans 7:15. What common sentiment do David, Jeremiah and Paul express?

2. What desire did David express in Psalm 19:12b-13? Is this your desire and prayer?

3. Read the following verses and list what provision God has made to answer David's prayer in Psalm 19:12b-13.
Psalms 119:9

Psalm 119:11

Psalm 119:67,71

Psalm 119:105

4. Challenge: Read James 1:22-25. Knowing God's Word is important. From these verses what other action are we told to do for our lives to be blessed?

5. Personal: Have you been like the person looking in a mirror and walking away? Whether or not you have, why don't you write a prayer of commitment, right now, asking God to help you be obedient to what He is teaching you in His Word.

Sixth Day: Read Psalm 19 concentrating on verse 14.

1. In this verse who is David seeking to please and how does he desire to do this?

2. Read Luke 6:45. How can we tell what is in a person's heart?

3. In Philippians 4:8 what does the Lord tell us to think about?

4. According to the following verses what should *not* come out of our mouths?

Ephesians 4:29

Ephesians 5:4

Philippians 2:14

James 3:9-10

5. From the following verses describe what should be in our hearts and show through our words.

Ephesians 5:19-20

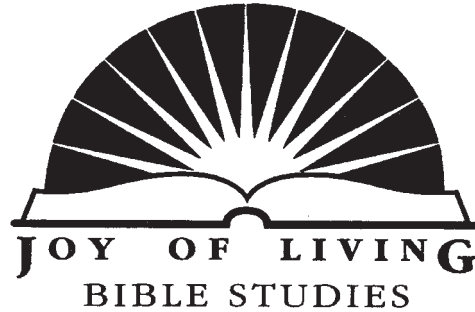
Colossians 4:6

1 Peter 3:15

6. Personal: What things have recently come out of your mouth that you regret? Write a prayer to God, asking Him to help you with what is in your heart and what comes out of your mouth. You may wish to re-write Psalm 19:14 in your own words.

Psalms of Faith

Lesson 4



Psalm 19—Opening the Books

The knowledge of God has been written for us in two volumes, and it takes both volumes to know God. There is a revelation in nature, and there is a revelation given in a Book in the written Word. Both are essential to the knowledge and understanding of God, declares this psalm.

The Book of Nature

In the first part of this psalm the psalmist, David, sets forth the book of nature:

*The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words,
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world. (Psalm 19:14)*

That is a declaration of the greatness of God as seen in the world of nature. Every night since time began the stars have come out, and they spell out to man the message of the power and wisdom of God. This is becoming especially vivid today. We are starting to read some of the fine print in this book of nature. We have now been able to step outside the envelope of atmosphere that surrounds the earth and see the stars in new glory. We have seen more of the orderliness of the universe, of the procession of the heavenly bodies, and of the marvelous mystery of gravitation, which holds the stars and planets in suspended balance with one another. All this is designed to speak of God and of His intelligence, wisdom and power.

The Story of the Heavens

In the first verse of Psalm 19 the clarity, the plainness of this revelation is underscored. Literally, "The heavens are 'narrating' the glory of God." They are telling forth a story which, when read, will reveal the glory of God. That is what they are for. And the firmament, the "stretched-out-ness" of space, the infinity of space, proclaims or "shouts about" His handiwork.

Speech and Knowledge

In Psalm 19:2 the abundance of this revelation is emphasized: "Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge."

The day pours out information about God and the night also spreads knowledge of God before us. In other words, truth about God is pouring in to us from all dimensions, if we only have eyes to see it. I never read this psalm without thinking of these words of Elizabeth Barrett Browning: "Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush aflame with God; but only those who see take off their shoes, the rest sit round it and pluck blackberries."

Having a "Seeing Eye"

It takes a *seeing* eye to perceive what God has said in nature, but that which can be seen is pouring in upon us. We have all felt it. It is why a hush falls upon a group of people who step out under the stars in a night sky, when the moon is riding high or the stars glow with glory. We feel the mystery of the infinite, reaching, calling out to our spirits, and a silence descends upon us. It is why men fall silent before the ebb and flow of the sea as they sense the restless, surging power of the sweeping tides. They understand something of the power of God in nature through that. It is why we feel a sense of loneliness and an intimation of infinity when we hear the wind howl, or we watch a storm rage, the thunder and lightning crashing around us. There is something of the voice of God that gets through to us on these occasions.

The Universality of Nature's Revelation

Psalm 19:3,4 declares the universality of this revelation: "There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard [the message is not conveyed through actual words which can be heard]; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."

In the fourteenth chapter of Acts is the account of the apostle Paul and his traveling companion, Barnabas, coming into a pagan city and being received as gods because they performed a miracle. The people thought they were Jupiter and Mercury and began to worship them. Paul and Barnabas stopped the crowd and said, "Don't do that; we're nothing but men, just like you! But we have come to declare the true God unto you, the One who made heaven and earth. He does not need to dwell in temples of stone, and He rejects these idols. But He has not left Himself without a witness among you. He has given you rain and food, has done good to you" (see Acts 14:15-17). They

were referring, of course, to the witness of nature, to its remarkable testimony that behind the universe is a Designer, a Planner, a great and wise Being of infinite power and might.

Clouds Block the Sun

Now, why is it that men do not get this message? Why is it obscured or distorted? In the next two verses the psalmist uses the sun to give us a specific illustration of this testimony of nature:

*In them he has set a tent for the sun,
which comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.
Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and there is nothing hid from its heat. (Psalm 19:4-6)*

To the observer on earth the sun appears to move across the sky. And as all men see it they are exposed to its testimony. But somehow that testimony has been clouded. Men do not see it clearly. They have missed the message. Instead of worshiping the God who made the sun, they worship the sun. Men have failed to see that just as the sun is needed to give light and strength to all living things on earth, so God is needed to give moral light and spiritual strength to men.

I have a print in my study of a famous painting by the great cowboy artist, Charles M. Russell. It shows three Blackfoot Indians facing the sun in the early morning and worshiping it. Why do men, especially children of nature like these Indians, worship the sun? Because the message that comes to us in nature is clouded. Men do not understand it clearly. And, as a result, that which has been designed to teach the deity and the power of God is being missed, overlooked.

Removing God from His Creation

This is the great issue at stake in the controversy over creation and evolution. I have no quarrel with scientists who want to come up with hypotheses as to the processes by which the universe was formed and life was developed. This is perfectly proper and is their sphere. The theory of evolution is an attempt at this, based upon certain types of evidence, which have been construed to support it.

But what is desperately wrong is that evolution, as it is largely taught in our schools and our popular communications media today, is often a means of removing God from His creation. It is a way of teaching that this whole process just happened, apart from any exercise of creative intelligence. Thus, the testimony of nature is rendered silent, and the message, which God designed to speak to man, is not heard. Man does not know that there is a God in the universe.

As a result something is happening to us as a people. In the first chapter of Romans the apostle Paul says that men are exposed to the truth about God evident in creation, but they deliberately reject it. Because they do, God lets certain things take place. Paul lists them for us. One is that because men do not like to retain God in their knowledge, He gives them over to a reprobate mind (see Romans 1:28).

Their thinking becomes distorted. That is what is producing the twisted applications of some of the discoveries of science, resulting in the tremendously complex, insoluble problems we are facing today.

Men do not want to retain God in their knowledge. There is a conspiracy of silence to eliminate God from His creation. Many scientists are unwilling to acknowledge that God is in the laboratory as well as in the church building or in the home. Therefore, God gives men over to a demented science, which produces not only helpful technological achievements but also those which blast and ruin us. Science and technology, once regarded as our benefactors, are now appearing to us more and more as our destroyers, having polluted the atmosphere, ravaged the forests, and destroyed many forms of life. Now we are confronted with the possibility of the total pollution and destruction of our environment. That is the judgment of God upon a world that twists and distorts the revelation of nature.

Nature is designed to tell us not only *how* things happened but *who* is behind them. It is perfectly proper for a scientist to investigate the realm of nature. Man has made some wonderful discoveries about how God put things together. These discoveries are fascinating, exciting, opening up whole new vistas of life, and properly so. What is wrong is the attempt to exclude God from that realm and not to allow nature to bring us to the understanding that, behind this universe, behind ourselves and the mystery of our own being, is the great intelligence and wisdom and power of a living God. That is why we feel so lost and lonely, alienated and forsaken in a mechanistic universe.

The Book of His Word

But the book of nature is only volume I. There is also another book, volume II, designed to answer the other pressing questions we humans ask: "Why? What is behind all this? What is the meaning of it all? Where are we headed, and why are we involved in this whole process?" Nature can never answer those questions. Those who work exclusively in the realm of nature can never state a satisfactory purpose for life. Nature simply does not embody that knowledge. If this great, throbbing question "Why?" is ever to be answered, the answer must come from the lips of God Himself. So He has given us a Book, and now the psalmist presses on to that. In the next few verses he outlines for us the effect of the Word, the written revelation of God, and what it can do in human life:

*The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul,
the testimony of the Lord is sure,
making wise the simple;
the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever,
the ordinances of the Lord are true,
and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold,
sweeter also than honey*

*and drippings of the honeycomb.
Moreover by them is thy servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.* (Psalm 19:7-11)

Nature feeds, strengthens, and supports our outer life. But here is the resource of God that touches the inner life and makes for the conquest of that inner space, which is so all-important to human life. The psalmist takes its characteristics one by one and shows us what it can do.

The Law of the Lord

First, “the law of the Lord.” That is the widest term for the written revelation God has given us. “The law of the Lord is perfect.” It is complete, there is nothing left out. It is comprehensive, it does everything that we need it to do. There is no part of your life, no problem that you will ever face in your life, no question with which you will ever be troubled, that the Word of God does not speak to and illuminate and meet. So it is perfect, “reviving the soul.”

The Testimony of the Lord

Second, “the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.” *Sure* means “dependable, reliable.” You can count upon this word to be true. Therefore, you do not need to know a lot about everything else. Now, the Word of God is not against knowledge; it is only against knowledge that does not begin at the right place. But even if you do not have a lot of knowledge, even if you are “simple” in terms of education, you can still be made wise by trusting Scripture because it is sure, it is reliable. So we are exhorted, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight” (Proverbs 3:5), and, “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death” (Proverbs 14:12).

You can be deluded and deceived by some of these alluring, gossamer philosophies that float around today, suggesting, for example, that pleasure is the reason for which you exist, that to enjoy yourself is the supreme object in life, that anything you do in the pursuit of pleasure is right. But the Word of God says, “No, that is not right!” God is the One who ultimately will give pleasure. It will be beyond anything you ever dreamed. But to follow pleasure for pleasure’s sake is the way of death, and it will lead you on to that. The testimony, the Word, is sure.

The Precepts of the Lord

Then, “the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.” Do you not rejoice in your heart to know that you are right about something? When you get into a controversy with somebody and he argues with you but you have the solid assurance that you are right—what a feeling! Well, that is the way it is with the Word of God. The glorious thing about His Book is that when the story is all told, when everything is said and done it will all end up just as it is written here. This Book is *right*, it is the way things really are.

The Commandment of the Lord

“The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.” Sometimes people wonder why the Bible speaks of adultery, fornication, incest, homosexuality and other perversions. It also speaks of

malice and bitterness and is filled with slaughter and bloodshed. Why does it recount the very things that are so prevalent in much of the immoral and violent entertainment that is so widely available today?

The Bible contains these things because it is a realistic book, which deals with life as it is. The difference is that it never shows evil as though it were good. It never makes adultery look attractive. The Bible always shows adultery as it really is—sordid and shameful. The Bible never makes homosexuality appear to be inconsequential, but reveals it to be a terrible distortion of human nature. Those engaged in homosexuality need to be prayed for and helped and delivered from the awful hold over them, which is destroying their manhood or their womanhood. The Bible is honest about life, frank and forthright. It is pure, enlightening the eyes, showing you the truth. That is what David has found.

The Fear of the Lord

“The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever.” The word *fear* is sometimes read as though it meant cowering in terror before some awful being who is about to strike you dead. But that is not what this means at all. It means respect, honest respect for God. That, says the psalmist, is clean, and it will keep you clean, too. It is “enduring for ever.” Once you enter into the fear of the Lord in its rightful sense you find that this produces a quality of life that keeps you from defiling yourself.

The Ordinances of the Lord

Then he sums them all up: “The ordinances of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.” They are also wealth-producing, enriching, “more to be desired than gold,” he goes on to say. And they are wonderfully pleasant, marvelously pleasure-producing, “sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”

Channels to Find the Lord

“Well,” you might say, “I don’t see these things in the Bible. I read my Bible and it’s supposed to do that for you, but when I read it I don’t find these things.” Do you know why? The psalmist will help us with this, too. We need to notice as we go through this list that when David talks about various aspects of revelation he always uses the phrase, “of the Lord. The law “of the Lord,” the testimony “of the Lord,” the precepts “of the Lord,” the commandment “of the Lord”—all the way through.

This, of course, means that these aspects in themselves are not what we need; they are channels by which we find the Lord. It is God who does all these wonderful things for us. He forgives and revives and cleanses and enlightens and makes us to rejoice. It is as we find Him in the pages of Scripture that these wonderful things happen to us.

Discerning Our Errors

The only things that can interfere are given in the next few verses. David asks, “But who can discern his errors?” (Psalm 19:12). That is the problem. If you cannot read the book of nature, or you cannot read the book of the Word, it is not because there is anything wrong with

either book. The reader is the problem. "Who can discern his error?" What a question that is! It indicates that we are all victims of hidden evil in our lives. If we examine ourselves we usually look fine in our own eyes. The very last verse in the book of Judges says that at one period of Israel's history, "Every man did what was right in his own eyes." That permitted just about anything and the chaos was terrible.

Everybody thinks that what he or she does is right. We cannot see our own errors. Yet these errors, these twists, these distortions of attitude and thought, are constantly affecting us so that we cannot see the truth the way it is. We do not understand it in nature and we do not understand it in the Word. We desperately need to be delivered from hidden errors. In the New Testament the apostle Peter says, "So put away all malice and all guile and insincerity and envy and a slander. [Then you will be] like newborn babes [who] long for the pure spiritual milk [of the Word], that by it you may grow up to salvation" (1 Peter 2:1,2).

Cleansing from Our Faults

What hinders our desire for the Word? These hidden errors. The psalmist faces the fact that something is wrong with the reader. So he concludes this psalm with a wonderful prayer:

*Clear [or cleanse] thou me from hidden faults.
Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me!
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.* (Psalm 19:12,13)

"Cleanse thou me from hidden faults." Is that your prayer? Do you know what will happen when you pray that way? You might think that God will take a sponge and wipe around inside you so you will not even know what those hidden faults were. But God does not do that. His way of dealing with hidden faults is either to send somebody to point them out to you or to bring them out through some circumstance in which you are suddenly confronted with what you have done or said. You find it is ugly, and you do not like it. That is the way God cleanses us from hidden faults. He opens up the secret places.

Usually He does it through other people because, as God well knows, we cannot see ourselves, but other people can see us. These faults are hidden to us but not to others. They see them very plainly. And we can see their hidden faults better than they can. You know that you can see the faults of somebody you are thinking about right now better than he can. You say, "I don't see how he can be so blind." Well, someone is thinking that very same way about you. We do not see ourselves. That is why it is necessary to pray, "Lord, cleanse thou me from hidden faults. Help me to see myself through the eyes of a friend who loves me enough to tell me the truth."

And then, "Keep me back from presumptuous sins." Presumptuous sins are those in which you are confident that you have what it takes to do what God wants. Self-confidence is presumption. God never asks us to do anything on that basis. If we depend upon ourselves we are acting presumptuously, and any activity that stems from

self-confidence is a presumptuous sin. "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). For me to act as though there is anything that I can contribute that does not originate with God is to be guilty of this kind of sin. The cure for this is dependence upon the activity of God in you as a believer. So David is praying, "Lord, keep me back from presumptuous activity. Let me realize that without you I can do nothing. Help me to depend upon you to work through me. Then I will be blameless and innocent of great transgression."

Acceptable in His Sight

Then he closes with these often-quoted words, which are wonderfully, marvelously penetrating:

*Let the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in thy sight,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.* (Psalm 19:14)

"Let the words of my mouth—what I say, and the meditation of my heart—what I think, be the kind of words and thoughts that have sat under the judgment of Your Word, Father, reflecting the instruction, the light, and the love of your heart, so that what I am, both inside and outside, will be acceptable before you." That is a wonderful prayer, is it not? That is what opens the books. When you pray that kind of prayer before you read either the book of the Word or the book of nature, you will find that God will speak to you in a marvelous way.

Thank you, Father, for this word of instruction to our own hearts and lives. We pray that we may follow through on this truth and live in the humble understanding that you have revealed yourself to us, Lord. Let us be ready to listen and see, ready to search and find out and discover. We ask in your name, Amen.

**Thank you for studying the Psalms
with us this spring!**

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