

P S A L M S

Managing Our Emotions

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Click on the title you'd like to see:

THINKING ABOUT OUR EMOTIONS

Study 1: **JOY: A TIME TO DANCE**
Leader's Guide — Participant's Guide

Study 2: **ABANDONMENT: WHEN YOU
FEEL ALONE**
Leader's Guide — Participant's Guide

Study 3: **FEAR: WHEN YOU'RE SCARED
SENSELESS**
Leader's Guide — Participant's Guide

Study 4: **GRATITUDE: MORE THAN JUST
AN ATTITUDE**
Leader's Guide — Participant's Guide

Study 5: **ANGER: WHEN YOUR BACK IS
AGAINST THE WALL**
Leader's Guide — Participant's Guide

Study 6: **CONTENTMENT: WHEN YOUR
SOUL IS AT REST**
Leader's Guide — Participant's Guide

Study 7: **DEPRESSION: WHEN
DARKNESS IS YOUR CLOSEST FRIEND**
Leader's Guide — Participant's Guide

Study 8: **DISAPPOINTMENT: WHEN
YOUR DREAMS DIE**
Leader's Guide — Participant's Guide

Study 9: **UNCERTAINTY: WHEN YOU'RE
NOT SURE OF YOUR NEXT MOVE**
Leader's Guide — Participant's Guide

Study 10: **RESTLESSNESS: WHEN YOU
STILL HAVEN'T FOUND WHAT YOU'RE
LOOKING FOR**
Leader's Guide — Participant's Guide

Study 11: **OUTRAGE: WHEN YOUR
HEART IS FILLED WITH REVENGE**
Leader's Guide — Participant's Guide

Study 12: **PRAISE: FIND JOY IN THE
SEASONS OF THE SOUL**
Leader's Guide — Participant's Guide

Study Through the Bible

Thinking About Our Emotions

By Timothy Peck

About 18 years ago my wife and I went to a marriage counselor to deal with some problems we were having in our marriage. It was nothing too serious, just some of the normal struggles couples tend to have over the years. But I remember meeting with the counselor one time in particular. She wanted me to talk about how aware I was of my emotions. I told her that I thought I was a pretty sensitive guy. So she asked me to name some of the emotions I'd experienced the previous week. I thought about it for a minute and really couldn't think of anything. I said, "Well I can remember being hungry the other day, and yesterday I was pretty tired." The counselor told me that hunger and fatigue weren't emotions. At that point I began to realize that, like a lot of men, I was pretty unaware of my emotions.

Emotions are both complicated and complex, both mysterious and mystifying. Even the experts are not sure exactly what causes us to experience emotions. Both social science and neurobiology have tried, to no avail, to explain the origin of emotions. And for Christians, emotions can be troubling, frustrating, and untrustworthy.

Most Christian books about emotions emphasize that you can't trust them. Maybe you have seen a diagram of a train, with "facts" in front, then "faith," followed by "feelings" represented by the train's caboose. The idea is that you let facts lead, followed by faith, and eventually your feelings will tag along. Nobody wants their life to be like a train led by its caboose, to let their emotions drive their lives. Yet emotions play an important and complex role in our lives; they are deeply entwined with what we believe to be facts and what we have faith in. So as much as that diagram helped me for a long time in my Christian life, managing our emotions is more complex than the diagram suggests.

Some emotions seem deeply spiritual; other emotions seem downright sinful. God created us to experience emotions, yet there are still godly and ungodly ways to manage them.

We must start with a common definition of emotions. Part of our emotional life originates in our brain chemistry. Dylan Evans, a professor at the University of London, says that emotions "are hardwired into the human brain." The Bible teaches that human beings are both body and soul, so a biblical view of emotions sees them as interplay between body and soul.

Emotions are physical sensations combined with thoughts and beliefs about particular events and people. The biological dimension of emotions includes the physical sensations that accompany them. But there's more to our emotions than the physical sensations that go with them. For example, imagine a person whose stomach is unsettled—a sensation we call butterflies in our stomach—who also has sweaty palms and a flushed face. These are all physical sensations caused by our nervous system. What emotion is that person experiencing? Well, it could be fear—perhaps a person who's just been called into the boss's office after an announcement that the company is laying off some employees. But it could also be guilt, perhaps someone who's just lied to her husband about where she was last night. But it could also be love, perhaps a 20-year-old man about to propose to his girlfriend. Fear, guilt, and love

all have similar physical sensations. So emotions are more than just the physical sensations—they're also beliefs and ideas. And unlike moods, emotions are focused on a particular person or thing.

The Psalms express emotions clearly. Psalms is the longest book of the Bible and it was written by various people. And while the rest of the Bible is directed to us, most of the Psalms are directed back to God, as his people use these inspired lyrics to express their hearts to God. John Calvin called Psalms “an anatomy of all parts of the soul.” I follow Walter Brueggeman’s example of dividing the Psalms into three categories:

- Psalms of orientation—the psalmist’s outlook is, “Life makes sense.”
- Psalms of disorientation—the psalmist’s outlook is, “Life doesn’t make any sense.”
- Psalms of reorientation—the psalmist’s outlook is, “Life is starting to make sense once again.”

In this series, we will be looking at all three of these kinds of psalms to learn how to manage our emotions.

Timothy Peck is Pastor of Teaching at Life Bible Fellowship Church in Upland, California.

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 1

LEADER'S GUIDE

Joy: A Time to Dance

Learn to rejoice in the past, present, and future.

We think joy is dependent upon our circumstances, but the Psalms help us realize that we can find joy in every circumstance. This study will look at ways to find joy in every area of life, because joy stems from the knowledge of God's work in our past, his plan for our present, and his power over our future.

Scripture:

Psalm 33:1-22

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

Read Psalm 33:1–3.

How do we express joy? Psalm 33 is a song of joy and a call to worship, to assemble in celebration.

In the Hebrew, all pronouns in this psalm are plural, meaning that this joy is something that happens with others. The assembly is encouraged to express their joy with various kinds of instruments. Any and every instrument can be an instrument of joy. God deserves the best praise we can offer.

But how can we express joy if we don't feel joyful? Our circumstances are always changing, so we must find our joy in God.

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] How would you define joy?
- [Q] What makes you feel joyful at church? Why?
 - How does joy happen with others in a way that it doesn't happen when we're by ourselves?
- [Q] What does it mean to find our joy in God rather than in our circumstances?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We find joy by remembering God's voice from the past.

Read Psalm 33:4–9.

Though we usually think of "the word of God" as being the Bible, this psalm is talking about God's voice in actions and events. Verses 6 and 7 describe the Creation account and God's parting of the Red Sea—God's voice caused both miracles to happen. This psalm encourages us to remember how God has spoken in the past, as that remembrance will evoke joy in our hearts.

John 1:14 says that God's word became flesh in Jesus Christ. Every Passover, the people of Israel experienced joy as they remembered God's voice from the past. Every Easter, we celebrate with joy the remembrance of how, through God's voice, Jesus rose from the grave.

So the secret of joy is to take our focus off of our circumstances and ourselves and to put it firmly upon God and his goodness. When we look at what he has done in the past, we are better able to trust him for the future, because we realize that he is faithful and good.

- [Q] Name all the things that we can praise God for, according to verses 4–9.
 - How can knowing those things about God bring you joy?
- [Q] If we know God is right, true, faithful, just, loving, and powerful, how does that help us cope with difficult circumstances?
- [Q] Have you ever experienced joy in the midst of something that was hard? What allowed you to be joyful in that situation?
- [Q] Name a time in your own past when God proved his faithfulness.
 - How can that help you trust him with the difficulties you are facing now?

Teaching point two: We find joy by looking for God's plan in the present.

Read Psalm 33:10–12.

The psalm shifts here from the past to the present. God foils the plans of superpower nations, yet his plans are immovable.

The psalm encourages us to look for God's plan in whatever circumstance we experience. Jesus was able to endure the Cross because of the joy set before him (Hebrews 12:2).

Sometimes God's plan seems hidden and unseen. This is the theme of the movie *Signs*, a film about a pastor named Graham Hess who loses his faith after his wife dies in an auto accident. Reverend Hess resigns from his church because he no longer believes in God. As the movie unfolds, complete with an alien invasion of Earth, Graham suddenly sees how things that looked like random accidents are part of a larger plan. He realizes that God does have a plan, and that the things he thought were cruel and random really have purpose and meaning. Through that he rediscovers his faith in God.

God is able to weave all of our life circumstances together to create a wonderful tapestry that accomplishes his purposes.

- [Q] How does knowing that God can thwart nations encourage you in your difficult circumstances?
- [Q] How can you find joy in knowing that God's plans stand firm forever? (Keep in mind that he is good; he never has evil plans.)
- [Q] What nation is referred to in verse 12?

Leader's Note: Verse 12 is often misused by Christians; it focuses solely on the nation of Israel's unique role in the plans and purposes of God. No other nation has he chosen for his inheritance.

Teaching point three: We find joy by acknowledging God's watchfulness in our lives.

Read Psalm 33:13–15.

These verses continue in the present tense, but shift focus to the individual level. God has formed every heart and can see inside each of us, and though this is a scary thought, it's also comforting.

God not only sees our hearts; he sees our actions. God is concerned with our concerns. Some people believe that God is too busy running the world to care about our little struggles. This psalm shows that is not true.

Acknowledging God's watchfulness over our lives brings us joy and helps us live for God.

[Q] Which of the following best describes your attitude toward God's watchfulness?

- It terrifies me because I'm afraid of his disapproval.
- It brings me joy because I know he is taking care of me.
- It terrifies me when I'm being disobedient to him, but comforts me when I'm walking in his ways.
- It brings me joy even when I know he disapproves, because that shows he cares for me.
- Other.

What does your choice tell you about your view of God?

What does it tell you about your view of yourself?

[Q] What misconceptions of God do you need to discard in order to experience joy in his watchfulness?

Optional Activity

Purpose: To help us identify our misconceptions about God.

Activity: Write down the first 10 things to enter your mind when you think about God. Now list all of God's good qualities mentioned in Psalm 33. How does your list compare with the list in Psalm 33? What does that tell you about your view of God? Is it accurate, or tainted by experiences with past authorities?

Teaching point four: We find joy by anticipating God's mighty power.

Read Psalm 33:16–22.

These verses shift to the future tense. The usual things we place our hope in are unreliable. Even the things that people usually look to for security are an illusion.

Verses 18 and 22 refer to God's "unfailing love"—his *hesed*, his covenant love. Our hope for God's mighty power in our lives is linked to God's covenant love. Christians have entered into a

covenant relationship with God. God will do everything he has promised to do in our lives, and he has the power to do it.

- [Q] In what ways do you hope in God's unfailing love?
- [Q] Does your heart rejoice in God? Why or why not?
- [Q] What does God's power mean to your personal life?
 - What does it mean for your future?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Psalm 33 encourages us to find joy in our relationship with God. Unlike joy that is based on circumstances, joy found in God lasts forever. By remembering God's voice from the past, looking for his plan and watchfulness in the present, and anticipating his power in the future, lasting joy can be found. The Bible promises we can find joy in any circumstance. Read Philippians 4:4 and James 1:2-3.

In every situation, we can be assured that God is good and working on our behalf.

- [Q] What is the connection between praise to God and joy?
 - Why are they so intricately linked?
 - Why does joy elude us when we focus on ourselves rather than God?

Action Point: Mention to the group one thing you are struggling with. It may be a circumstance, a bad habit, or a relationship. Ask the group how they think you can find joy in the midst of that difficult situation. End by praising God for his victory in this area and finding his joy.

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 1

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Joy: A Time to Dance

Learn to rejoice in the past, present, and future.

We think joy is dependent upon our circumstances, but the Psalms help us realize that we can find joy in every circumstance. This study will look at ways to find joy in every area of life, because joy stems from the knowledge of God's work in our past, his plan for our present, and his power over our future.

Scripture:

Psalm 33:1-22

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

How can we express joy if we don't feel joyful? Our circumstances are always changing, so we must find our joy in God.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We find joy by remembering God's voice from the past.

Teaching point two: We find joy by looking for God's plan in the present.

Teaching point three: We find joy by acknowledging God's watchfulness in our lives.

Teaching point four: We find joy by anticipating God's mighty power.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Psalm 33 encourages us to find joy in our relationship with God. Unlike joy that is based on circumstances, joy found in God lasts forever. By remembering God's voice from the past, looking for his plan and watchfulness in the present, and anticipating his power in the future, lasting joy can be found.

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 2

LEADER'S GUIDE

Abandonment: When You Feel Alone

Find strength when you feel forsaken.

Many struggle with how to have faith through times of desolation. But the Scriptures offer strength and hope to those feeling forsaken by God. When we feel abandoned, we should be honest about our pain, but we should also look to community and to God to find strength. Psalm 22 shows us how to do that.

Scripture:

Psalm 22:1-31

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

Sometimes we feel utterly alone, even when surrounded by other people. That feeling leads to the thought that God and others have abandoned us. Psalm 22 expresses this feeling of abandonment.

Although this psalm was written sometime around 900 B.C., its correlation to Jesus nine centuries later is amazing. (This is why the New Testament quotes or alludes to this psalm 24 different times.) The first verse of the psalm has the words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus recited these words on the cross just before he died. The songwriter complains that he's scorned and despised by people, which is consistent with what happened to Jesus 900 years later.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing parallels is in verse 16, where the songwriter says that his enemies have pierced his hands and feet. This sounds a lot like death by crucifixion. But crucifixion as a method of execution was unknown when this psalm was written. The Persians would be the first to use crucifixion, though they wouldn't start until a few hundred years later. Verse 16 seems to look forward to what Jesus would experience as his executioners pounded nails into his hands and feet.

In verse 18, the psalmist describes his enemies as dividing his garments and casting lots for his clothing. And that's exactly what happened to Jesus as he was dying on the cross: Roman soldiers gambled for his clothing. So Psalm 22 is part prophecy, as it looks ahead to the suffering of Jesus some 900 years in the future. But it's also a psalm of emotion that people have identified with throughout the centuries.

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] Have you ever felt abandoned by a person or by God? Explain.
- [Q] Did Jesus ever feel abandoned by God? If so, when and why?

Leader's Note: *He was abandoned by God on the cross when he took our sins upon himself. This is why he cried out in agony in the first line of Psalm 22.*

- [Q] Since God abandoned Jesus, does that mean we might be abandoned, too?

Leader's Note: *Just the opposite. Because Jesus took our sin onto himself, God never will abandon us.*

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We all go through times when we feel abandoned.

Read Psalm 22:1–21.

David, who wrote this psalm, felt tension between his experience and his theology. God not only seemed far away, he was also silent. David felt utterly forsaken, yet there is nothing in the psalm to indicate that God's distance was due to David's sin.

David acknowledged his faith, yet he does not find the comfort his forefathers were given.

Most people in the ancient world believed something called "the doctrine of divine retribution." The essence of this doctrine was that if you were successful and wealthy, then God liked you. But if your life was painful and difficult, you had hidden sin, you were under God's judgment. So wealth and happiness were viewed as infallible signs of God's blessing, and sickness and trouble were viewed as infallible signs of God's judgment. The Book of Job was written, at least in part, to call this idea into question, but it was widespread in the ancient world.

Since David's life was filled with difficulty, people assumed he was under God's curse. Assuming this idea of divine retribution, people would think, "He must have done something really awful to deserve what he's experiencing." "He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him," they said with sarcasm. Of course, people said the same thing to Jesus as he died on the cross. "If you are the king of the Jews," they said, "save yourself" (Luke 23:37). So while God seemed silent, the people were speaking, and their words hurt. But David remembered how God cared for him in the past.

It's not unspiritual to feel godforsaken. Terry Anderson, a Christian journalist, was kidnapped by terrorists in 1985 and held hostage for six and half years. Jyodi, a teenaged girl in India, was tricked into sex slavery where she contracted HIV and became pregnant. Mother Teresa felt abandoned by God at times. Throughout her life she was plagued by feelings of forsakenness and aloneness, as reflected in her journal: "I am told God lives in me—and yet the reality of darkness and coldness and emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul." Later she wrote, "I want God with all the power of my soul—and yet between us there is a terrible separation ... Heaven from every side is closed."

We all go through times of abandonment, and we shouldn't try to hide it or pretend that we don't.

[Q] Why do you think God sometimes seems silent?

- Why do you think he allows us to experience spiritually dry times as well as rich ones?

[Q] What does David say in this psalm to attempt to gain perspective?

Leader's Note: *He remembers what God did for his ancestors. He's trying to remember that God is faithful.*

[Q] Can we counteract feelings of abandonment the way David did?

[Q] David pictured himself surrounded by wild animals, which were symbolic of his enemies. Why is it often hard to trust others when we feel forsaken?

[Q] What does this psalm teach us about being honest with God?

- How can God use our honesty?

Leader's Note: *When we are honest about our feelings of despair, God meets us where we are and sustains us. If we don't admit it and try to tough it out, we won't see our need to let him help us.*

Teaching point two: We can find strength by choosing to be in community.

Read Psalm 22:22–25.

If we only had the first 21 verses of this psalm, we would feel despair. But something changes in verse 22. David's situation has not changed; the only thing that has changed is that he is in community with God's people.

Despite our urge to isolate ourselves when we feel abandoned, choosing community will help us find strength. We must choose to be with others because we know that strength comes from relationship. Choosing community means choosing to worship God with others as well as investing in their lives.

[Q] When you get discouraged, do you tend to withdraw or surround yourself with others?

- What kind of problems can withdrawing cause?
- What kind of community should we surround ourselves with when we are discouraged?

[Q] What is David saying to others in this psalm?

Leader's Note: *He is praising God and encouraging others to trust God.*

[Q] What does it do to your attitude to praise God to others? Give an example.

Teaching point three: We can find hope by looking to God's future kingdom.

Read Psalm 22:26–31.

Being in community is not a cure-all for our feelings of abandonment. In addition to the strength we gain from community, we also need hope.

David's situation hadn't changed, but his outlook on life had. He pictured the future consummation of God's kingdom, celebrated at a great banquet. He knew that both nations and future generations then would turn to God.

[Q] What kind of hope does God give us? Is it a wishful hope, such as "I hope God is faithful"? Or is it a certain hope, such as, "My hope is in the fact that God is faithful"? Explain the difference.

[Q] Which of the following brings you the most hope in God's future kingdom?

- Singing God's praises
- Reading God's Word
- Seeing God's hand in nature

- Remembering God's goodness to you and others in the past
- Spending time with others who love God
- Reflecting on heaven
- Other

Explain your selection.

Optional Activity

Purpose: To help us learn to bank on the certain hope of God's goodness.

Activity: Advise the following people as to how they can find hope in God:

- Jennifer, who is only 16, just lost her mother to cancer.
- Malcolm has lost contact with his only son, who ran away last year.
- Marion, who is a single mom, was just let go from her job.
- Karston was in a car accident that left him in a wheelchair.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

God is not shocked when we feel forsaken by him. He became flesh in Jesus Christ to experience abandonment on our behalf.

But we can help each other through these times. Maybe you've heard the inspirational poem called "Footprints." It's about a person who looked back on their life and saw two sets of footprints in the sand, symbolizing Jesus walking with them through life. But during the really tough times there was only one set of footprints, because during those times, God carried the person.

Many people have found hope and inspiration from that poem. But "Footprints" misses one crucial dimension about life that this psalm emphasizes. In life, we were never meant to walk alone. If life is just me and God, two sets of footprints during the good times and one set during the tough times, then I may feel despair. Life is meant to be a whole bunch of footprints as we walk together through this journey of life.

A group of developmentally disabled people was competing in the Special Olympics. During the 100-yard dash, the group of athletes all started running toward the finish line. But one of the runners tripped and fell down on the track. Then a strange thing happened—all the other runners stopped, turned back, and helped the fallen runner to her feet. Then, together, they ran toward the finish line. The runners chose finishing together instead of winning the race individually.

[Q] If you are feeling despair, how can reaching out to others relieve your pain and restore your faith in God?

- What is the difference between that attitude and waiting for someone to come lift us up? Why does waiting for someone to help often fail to work?

Action Point: If you are feeling abandoned or know someone else who feels abandoned, the solution may be the same. Reach out to someone else and let God use you to relieve another's suffering. Tell your group about one person God is prompting you to reach out to. Pray that each person in the group would have the courage to do so.

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 2

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Abandonment: When You Feel Alone

Find strength when you feel forsaken.

Many have struggled with how to have faith through times of desolation. But the Scriptures offer strength and hope to those feeling forsaken by God. When we feel abandoned, we should be honest about our pain, but we should also look to community and to God to find strength. Psalm 22 shows us how to do that.

Scripture:

Psalm 22:1-31

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Sometimes we feel utterly alone, even when surrounded by other people. That feeling leads to the thought that God and others have abandoned us. Psalm 22 expresses this feeling of abandonment.

Although this psalm was written sometime around 900 B.C., its correlation to Jesus nine centuries later is amazing. This is why the New Testament quotes or alludes to this psalm 24 different times.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We all go through times when we feel abandoned.

Teaching point two: We can find strength by choosing to be in community.

Teaching point three: We can find hope by looking to God's future kingdom.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

God is not shocked when we feel forsaken by him. He became flesh in Jesus Christ to experience abandonment on our behalf. But we can help each other through these times.

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 3

LEADER'S GUIDE

Fear: When You're Scared Senseless

Find peace when you are afraid.

Whether it's a physical, emotional, or spiritual battle, we've all fought fear. The good news we gain from the Psalms is that we can learn to handle fear rationally and with confidence. Fear is a natural reaction to some situations, but we can find peace by calling out to God, surrendering to him what we cannot control, and choosing to walk in faith.

Scripture:

Psalm 55:1-23

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

All of us experience fear. A few years ago, the Gallup organization asked Americans what they were most afraid of.

Number one on the list was snakes (51%). Number two was public speaking (40%). In fact, a lot of people are more afraid of public speaking than they are of dying.

Other statistics:

- 37 percent fear heights
- 34 percent fear being closed in small spaces
- 27 percent fear spiders and insects,
- 21 percent fear needles and getting shots
- 20 percent fear mice
- 18 percent fear flying on airplanes

The fears named in the Gallup poll are ones many of us identify with, but often fears can't even be named until we face them. Some fears are intense and overwhelming; others simmer inside us for long periods of time. Some fears are rational; others are irrational. But we all struggle with fear.

More than any other emotion we experience, fear is linked to our brain and our nervous system. When we walk into a potentially dangerous situation, our nervous system immediately kicks in with a fear response. This response consists of a number of involuntary reactions that occur in our body. For instance, our brain diverts blood away from our digestive system and to our muscles in case we have to run or fight. Our eyes dilate, making our peripheral vision better. Our body releases adrenaline, which intensifies our awareness and gives us extra energy, in case we have to run.

Neurobiologists have identified two separate neurological pathways for these fear responses in our brains. The first is what they call a short pathway; it runs from the thalamus in our brain directly to the amygdala. The amygdala is an almond-shaped mass located on the temporal lobe of our brain. This short pathway is an immediate response; it's quick, but it's often wrong because it's so quick. The second neural pathway is a longer one; it goes from the thalamus to the cortex and then to the amygdala. This longer pathway takes a split second longer, but since it passes through the cortex, your brain can evaluate the threat to determine whether it's really dangerous or not. If the threat isn't really a danger, the cortex steps in and stops the fear response. Some neurobiologists think that people who struggle with phobias have some sort of malfunction in this longer pathway and only have the functioning short pathway.

Consider a true example of how these pathways work: A woman in Arkansas was sitting in her car after shopping when she heard a loud bang and felt a sharp pain the back of her head. As she was holding her hands behind her head, a passerby asked if she was okay.

She said, "I've been shot in the head and I'm holding in my brains."

She responded from the short path that bypasses the cortex. The truth was, the heat caused a biscuit canister to explode in the back seat, creating a loud explosion as it shot biscuit dough into the back of her head. Only after the cortex kicked in could she evaluate the false alarm.

What we experience as fear is a series of involuntary responses that occur in our bodies.

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] What are you most afraid of? Why?
- [Q] Have you ever had a fear you got over? If so, how?
- [Q] Do you think most of our fears are valid or imagined? Explain.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: When we're afraid, we dwell on possibilities and want to run, fight, or distrust others.

Read Psalm 55:1–5.

Almost every Hebrew word for fear occurs in the first five verses of this psalm. The first form of fear mentioned is troubling thoughts, because we obsess about the “what ifs” when we're afraid. Dwelling on the possibilities of what might happen often produces an oppressive restlessness.

[Q] Do you think most of your fears are “what ifs” or actual fears? Explain.

[Q] What was David afraid of, according to verse 3?

- Was he suffering from the “what ifs”? What was that doing to him?

When we're afraid, we also want to run. Read Psalm 55:6–7.

Neurobiologists have identified a “fight or flight” reaction in our brains that prepares us to run or defend ourselves. David, the psalmist, wished he were a dove so he could escape his circumstances. When we're afraid, we want to get away more than anything else.

[Q] Recount a time that you wanted to flee because of your fear. What happened?

When we're afraid, we want to fight. Read Psalm 55:15.

This verse is what scholars call an imprecatory prayer—a prayer that calls down a curse or death on one's enemies. Imprecatory prayers in the psalms are troubling because they seem hateful and unchristian. In verse 15, David expressed to God his urge to lash out. When a person is afraid, they become capable of doing things totally out of character. Asking God to destroy our enemies may help us to defuse our hatred of them and love them.

[Q] Have you ever prayed an imprecatory prayer? If so, did it defuse or fuel your hatred?

[Q] How might such honesty with God help you eventually deal with your anger?

When we're afraid, we become distrustful. Read Psalm 55:9–14.

David's fear was almost paranoia; he pictured the entire city plotting against him. These feelings stemmed from betrayal by a close companion. When we're afraid, we grow distrustful, sometimes rightfully, but sometimes irrationally. For example, after the September 11, 2001, attacks, airline passengers were wary of all Arabic-speaking people.

[Q] What causes us to irrationally mistrust others?

- How can we know if our mistrust is valid or not?

Leader's Note: *The advice of other mature Christians can help us sort this out.*

[Q] Which of the following do you most fear?

- Uncertainty about life
- Betrayal by others
- A physical circumstance (such as heights, crowds, insects)
- Strangers
- Financial insecurity
- Illness
- Other

Explain your selection.

Teaching point two: We find peace when we surrender what we can't control to God.

Read Psalm 55:16–18.

David tried to connect with God by calling aloud to him. We often forget to ask God for help. Instead we turn to friends who will validate our fears.

[Q] Why did David cry out evening, morning, and noon? What principle can we draw from this to help us overcome our fears?

[Q] God doesn't always deliver us from our fears. For example, we may pray that he take our cancer away, deliver us from bankruptcy, or protect us from harm during war, but he doesn't always do that. So how can crying out to him all day help us with our fears?

Leader's Note: *We have the assurance that he is with us, understands our fear, and is acting according to his perfect love and wisdom. We trust God, not deliverance from the circumstance.*

Read Psalm 55:19–23.

David was convinced that God is on the throne, despite his circumstances. Throughout the Bible, the reader is urged to fear God—we are to approach God with a reverent awe. If we fear God, we won't need to fear anyone or anything else.

Timothy Peck shares this experience:

During my first few years of marriage, I was doing laundry in a laundromat in Montclair. I was the only person in the laundromat when suddenly a guy ran inside with a gun in one hand and a paper bag in the other. He had just robbed the bank next door and was trying to get away. As he made eye contact with me, I could see police cars out the back door. He was panicked, and I could tell that he thought I was his ticket to freedom. He pointed that gun at me and said, "Come here."

Obviously, my body's fear response was kicking in, as adrenaline flooded my body, my eyes dilated, and so forth. But at the same time I experienced total peace that God was in control. I knew that my life was in God's hands, and that if my time hadn't yet come, nothing could hurt me. So I just ignored him and went back to my laundry. He ended up taking another hostage from a different store and escaping. I didn't feel peace because I'm a courageous person. It's because I feared God and was confident in him.

Verse 22 exhorts us to cast our cares upon God; he won't let us fall.

All of us have a circle of concern in our lives. Your circle of concern represents the people and situations you're concerned about today. It might be your finances, your health, your job, your marriage, your children, and so forth. All of us have certain situations and people we're concerned about. These things cause us to worry.

But inside that circle of concern is a smaller circle; Stephen Covey calls it a "circle of influence."¹ These are the things in our circle of concern that we have some control over. For example, if you're concerned about a test you have to take on Wednesday, it's inside your circle of influence because you can study for the test.

But after Wednesday, that test will no longer be in your circle of influence. So the things we're concerned about that we have some measure of control over are in the circle of influence, but the things that are out of our control are outside the circle of influence.

Verse 22 also urges us to focus our energies on the situations we actually have control over. God's circle of concern is identical to his circle of influence; he has the power to intervene in any circumstance.

[Q] What does verse 19 tell us about God that can help us rest from our fears?

[Q] How does God sustain us in the midst of our fears? Give practical examples.

¹ Stephen Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

Optional Activity

Purpose: To help us learn how to separate situations we have control over from those we don't.

Activity: Quickly jot down five things you are afraid of.

Now look back over your list. Put a check next to the ones you can actually do something about. Ask the group to pray with you concerning the ones that do not have a check next to them. Pray that you will be able to entrust them to God rather than continue to carry the fear.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

We find peace when we walk in faith. Psalm 55 ends with “But as for me, I trust in you.” Having faith in times of fear may sound like a cliché, but it’s the only true way forward. When we believe God has the power to do anything, the character to do the right thing, and the love to care about us, we will find peace.

Fear is natural. It’s a physiological response God hardwired into our brains to protect us. But despite our physical reactions to scary situations, we have a choice about how to handle our fear. We can allow our fear to paralyze us, or we can ask God for help, surrender what we cannot control to him, and decide to move forward in faith.

Action Point: Admit to the group one thing you are afraid of. Pray together for victory over the thing each person in the group mentions.

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 3

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Fear: When You're Scared Senseless

Find peace when you are afraid.

Whether it's a physical, emotional, or spiritual battle, we've all fought fear. The good news we gain from the Psalms is that we can learn to handle fear rationally and with confidence. Fear is a natural reaction to some situations, but we can find peace by calling out to God, surrendering to him what we cannot control, and choosing to walk in faith.

Scripture:

Psalm 55:1-23

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

All of us experience fear. More than any other emotion we experience, fear is linked to our brain and nervous system. When we walk into a potentially dangerous situation, our nervous system immediately kicks in with a fear response. This response consists of a number of involuntary reactions that occur in our body. For instance, our brain diverts blood away from our digestive system and to our muscles in case we have to run or fight. Our eyes dilate, making our peripheral vision better. Our body releases adrenaline, which intensifies our awareness and gives us extra energy.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: When we're afraid, we dwell on possibilities and want to run, fight, or distrust others.

Teaching point two: We find peace when we surrender what we can't control to God.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

We find peace when we walk in faith. Psalm 55 ends with "But as for me, I trust in you." Having faith in times of fear may sound like a cliché, but it's the only true way forward. When we believe God has the power to do anything, the character to do the right thing, and the love to care about us, we will find peace.

Fear is natural. It's a physiological response God hardwired into our brains to protect us. But despite our physical reactions to scary situations, we have a choice about how to handle our fear. We can allow our fear to paralyze us, or we can ask God for help, surrender what we cannot control to him, and decide to move forward in faith.

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 4

LEADER'S GUIDE

Gratitude: More than Just an Attitude

Learn to be thankful for all things at any place and any time.

You can live with a continual attitude of gratitude. No matter what your circumstances, you can—and should—live a thankful life. Your life will overflow with gratitude when you're convinced of God's love for you and are reminded of his love through creation, your salvation history, and his current provision for you.

Scripture:

Psalm 136:1–26

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

Before an NBA playoff game between the Los Angeles Lakers and the San Antonio Spurs, the network interviewed Karl Malone of the Lakers. Malone's mom had died earlier that year, and when the interviewer asked about her, tears started streaming down Malone's face. He talked about how grateful he was for his mom's influence in his life and about how much he missed her. Here was arguably the toughest player in the NBA softly weeping as he thought about how grateful he was for his mom.

Our gratitude for people leads us down a path that ends with gratitude for God. Timothy Peck shares how he learned this principle:

It was in Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous that I first heard people talk about being grateful. It's in AA and NA that I first heard the phrase "an attitude of gratitude."

I remember looking around the room, and thinking, "What do these people have to be thankful about?" Many of them were there because they'd made a complete mess of their lives. Every chair was occupied by someone with more regrets than they could count. Some had done prison time, lost their driver's license, some were on probation. Most were divorced, in debt, and plagued with legal problems. Many of them had health problems due to their substance abuse: high blood pressure, liver problems, sexually transmitted diseases. Yet they talked about gratitude, about being thankful for what they had.

I wondered what it was that made them thankful, when so many people who had far more than they had never gave a second thought about gratitude. That's when I began to see that gratitude has nothing to do with how much you have. It has nothing to do with how much money, stuff, friends, or influence you have. People who overflow with these things never take the time to stop and be grateful, while people with just a little overflow with gratitude.

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] How can gratitude for people lead to gratitude to God and vice versa?
 - Can you share a time someone showed gratitude to you? How did that, in turn, make you grateful to God?
- [Q] How can we feel gratitude when our circumstances are bad, like those in Alcoholics Anonymous?
- [Q] How can you muster up gratitude when you don't feel grateful?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Psalm 136 offers a healthy perspective on gratitude. It is a unique psalm because it was written after Israel's return from exile in Babylon, some 400 years after King David lived. It was written for the worship service in the rebuilt Jewish temple. Today the psalm is used by Jewish people as they celebrate Passover. Each line is followed by the same refrain ("His love endures forever"); a group of singers sing the first line and the congregation sings the refrain.

Our lives overflow with gratitude when we're convinced God loves us. Read Psalm 136:1–3.

The Hebrew verb for "give thanks" conveys the idea of verbally acknowledging something—this thankfulness is more than just an attitude. The refrain, "His love endures forever," forms the basis for this command to thank God. The Hebrew word for "love" here is *hesed*, translated "steadfast love," or covenant love. God's steadfast love is forever; it's not temporary or conditional.

The person who is convinced of the loyal love of God has a heart that overflows with gratitude. So how can we know God loves us?

Teaching point one: We know God loves us because he created everything around us.

Read Psalm 136:4–9.

These verses are a poetic reflection on God's creation of heaven and earth. If God created everything around us, then everything around us belongs to God. Psalm 24:1 says, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it."

[Q] How does creation show God's love for us?

- Describe a time that you sensed God's love for you by observing his creation.

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To help us praise God for his creation.*

Activity: *If you were to rewrite these verses, what parts of creation would you mention? Following the pattern in Psalm 136, write five verses of gratitude to God for his creation.*

Teaching point two: We know God loves us because he saves us.

Read Psalm 136:10–24.

Every Passover, the Jewish people have a meal with their family and friends and retell the story of their salvation: God heard the Israelites' cries for deliverance from servitude to the Egyptians and brought them into the Promised Land. By remembering God's provision of salvation, the Israelites are reminded of his enduring love.

Jesus saved us from our servitude to sin; he is our Passover lamb. We can know God loves us because he brought us into a new covenant with himself and guides us toward his coming kingdom.

- [Q] Read John 3:16. No matter what is happening in our circumstances, we can know God loves us because of this verse. Why?
- [Q] Besides giving you eternal salvation (which is enough), in what other ways has God shown his love for you?

Teaching point three: We know God loves us because he provides for us.

Read Psalm 136:23–26.

The author thinks of his own circumstances as he writes this psalm—Israel is returning from Babylon. He sees God’s present provision as a sign of his love. God’s love for us is evidenced in his provision for our lives, in the big and the small things.

- [Q] Share a story of how God provided for you or for someone you know.
- [Q] Does hearing stories of how God provides for others encourage your own faith? Explain.
- [Q] What are some ways God provides for us besides our physical needs?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Our awareness of God’s love overflows as gratitude. A saying goes, “Gratitude can turn an ordinary meal into a feast, a house into a home, and a stranger into a friend.” A life of gratitude is a life well lived.

- [Q] Explain how gratitude can turn an ordinary meal into a feast, a house into a home, and a stranger into a friend.

Action Point: Close with a group prayer, praising God for his creation, salvation, and provision.

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 4

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Gratitude: More than Just an Attitude

Learn to be thankful for all things at any place and any time.

You can live with a continual attitude of gratitude. No matter what your circumstances, you can—and should—live a thankful life. Your life will overflow with gratitude when you're convinced of God's love for you and are reminded of his love through creation, your salvation history, and his current provision for you.

Scripture:

Psalm 136:1–26

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Our gratitude for people leads us down a path that ends with gratitude for God.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We know God loves us because he created everything around us.

Teaching point two: We know God loves us because he saves us.

Teaching point three: We know God loves us because he provides for us.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Our awareness of God's love overflows as gratitude. A saying goes, "Gratitude can turn an ordinary meal into a feast, a house into a home, and a stranger into a friend." A life of gratitude is a life well lived.

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 5

LEADER'S GUIDE

Anger: When Your Back Is Against the Wall

Learn to keep anger from being destructive.

Anger is a natural, God-given emotion, which, though potentially harmful, can be used constructively. Everyone experiences the emotion of anger, so we must learn how to deal with it in a healthy and righteous way. The Psalms give us examples of godly ways to express anger.

Scripture:

Psalm 79:1-13

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

Psychologists tell us anger is a secondary emotion—that it arises in response to another emotion, usually hurt or fear. Neurobiologists tell us our anger response is hardwired into our bodies—actual physiological changes occur within our bodies when we are angry.

Anger in and of itself is not bad; God created us to get angry sometimes. The key is learning how to express anger without it being destructive; it even can be constructive. Psalm 79 sheds light on anger and healthy ways to deal with it.

Psalm 79 is a “lament” psalm. Jewish people today read the psalm to remember the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. The songwriter begins with a series of complaints: the Babylonians have destroyed the temple, the city is reduced to rubble, many have died, and the nations are scoffing at God’s inaction. Then he asks God to do something—to help or to take vengeance. He comes to see God’s judgment is behind all that has happened, and he also understands his own responsibility for the state of affairs.

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] How do you usually express anger? Do you lash out physically or verbally, or do you turn it inward toward yourself?
- [Q] Give an example of when you handled anger well.
 - Give an example of when you handled anger poorly.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We feel anger when we believe that we’ve been wronged, which leads us to want vindication.

Read Psalm 79.

The songwriter’s anger stems from his belief that the Babylonians have wronged him. Anger is usually triggered by feelings of being wronged. It may not even be true, but our belief that someone has wronged us leads to anger, regardless of that belief’s validity.

In verse 12, the psalmist asks God to pour out his wrath on the Babylonians. When we’re mad, we want the people who have hurt us to experience what we are experiencing. Anger can become very dangerous, because we are tempted to do things that we would regret afterward.

In Chuck Colson’s book *The Body*, he writes of a congregation in Maine that became so divided that a fistfight broke out between the pastor and the elder board chairman. The fight began during the worship service in front of the communion table and became so intense the police had to break it up.

If we are not immune to feeling hurt, then we are not immune to the desire to hurt others.

In verse 10, the psalmist wants revenge on those who are taunting his nation. When we're angry, we want to hurt those who hurt us, but we also want to show that we are right. We all feel there is a cosmic justice system that should maintain equilibrium. When we are wronged, the balance of justice is thrown off kilter, and we're tempted to right it ourselves.

[Q] What kind of thing most often makes you angry?

- Have you ever been angry because you perceived something wrongly? If so, how did you feel when you recognized the truth?

[Q] What offended the psalmist according to verse 12?

- What is the difference between feeling we've been wronged and defending someone else who has been wronged?

[Q] What advantage is there in letting God vindicate us instead of trying to vindicate ourselves?

- How should we handle it if we are falsely accused and never are vindicated in our lifetime?

Teaching point two: In dealing with our anger, we must first admit we are angry.

This psalm describes how one person managed his anger, and within it we can find principles to help us with our own anger.

The psalmist does nothing to conceal his anger. He doesn't censor his prayer to make it more theologically correct. He simply pours out what is in his heart.

Christian psychologist Norm Wright says, "One reason anger is so difficult for most of us to deal with is that we are not comfortable admitting that we are angry. This is especially true for many Christians who believe that anger is a sign of spiritual immaturity or weakness."²

If we don't admit our anger, we internalize it in destructive ways. Internalized anger can become depression or physical sickness. Our experience of anger is a physiological response to an emotion, so the experience itself is morally neutral.

We need to express our anger to God in prayer. We are used to filtering our prayers through a grid of theological correctness. Psalm 79 is an "unsanitized" prayer; it is a cry from the heart that might not be exactly right. But God can handle our anger because he knows what we're thinking and feeling anyway. By expressing our anger to God in prayer, we release some of its toxicity.

[Q] Do you have a hard time admitting you are angry? If so, why?

- What are some ways we can know we are angry besides feeling as though we are going to lose our temper?

² *Winning Over Your Emotions*, pp. 58–59.

Leader's Note: *Some other symptoms that we are angry may include poor concentration, irritability, a racing heart, churning stomach, tense muscles, uncontrollable crying, substance abuse, or depression.*

[Q] Have you ever prayed the way this psalmist does? Why or why not?

- What might be some advantages to praying this way?
- How is this way of expressing anger better than taking it out on others?
- How did the psalmist end his prayer (v. 13)?

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To help us learn how to admit when we are angry.*

Activity: *Write your own psalm to God expressing something you are angry about. It can be a personal anger, or anger at some wrong or injustice in society. Be honest with God about how you feel. End the psalm with praise to God. Don't show it to anyone else. Instead, take it home and ask God to give you his perspective on the matter. Look at your psalm in a week and see if your heart has changed on the matter.*

Teaching point three: We need to seek forgiveness for our own role in the situation.

In verse 9, the psalmist alternates between blaming the Babylonians for his problems and admitting his own wrongdoing. As he takes inventory of his actions, he realizes his sins have played a role in what he's experiencing.

When we're mad, we must take time to assess how we might have contributed to the problem. Problems rarely are one person's entire fault. We may need others to help us see where we have gone wrong.

We also need to seek forgiveness for our role in the situation. In verses 8–9, the psalmist asks for God's mercy, and mercy is only needed if sin has been committed. He asks God to forgive his own sins and the sins of his people. We need to take ownership of any role we've played in the situation and apologize.

[Q] We want to blame others when we're angry. How does examining our own motives counteract that?

[Q] How might taking time to see our own guilt in a matter help diffuse our anger?

[Q] What if we are 10 percent wrong and the other person is 90 percent wrong? What should we do about our 10 percent?

- How might it affect the other person if we take responsibility for what we did wrong, even if it's minor?

Teaching point four: We need to leave room for God to work.

It's hard for us to pray this psalm because of its vengefulness, especially in light of the teachings of Jesus. Read Luke 6:27–28.

Perhaps it's by praying for the destruction of others that we are able to love them; by leaving them to God's wrath we are able to leave them in his hands. Read Romans 12:17–19.

By expressing our anger, we are purged of our resentment and are free to love. God can be trusted with our rage and won't allow the tears we shed to be wasted.

[Q] Can we love our enemies and still pray as the psalmist did? Why or why not?

- How might such honest prayer actually change your heart toward a person?
- Jesus said to pray for those who mistreat you. What do you think we should pray for them?

[Q] According to Romans 12:19, God gets angry and avenges. Why can't we?

Leader's Note: *God's anger and vengeance is never selfish or mistaken.*

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Psalm 79 doesn't give us a step-by-step formula for dealing with our anger, but it does assure us of God's presence at all times. By watching how the psalmist deals with his anger, we gain insight into how to deal with our own.

Action Point: Which teaching point do you most need to apply? Easily feeling wronged? Admitting you're angry? Seeking forgiveness for your part in the problem? Leaving room for God to work? Share your answer with the group and ask them to pray for this area.

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 5

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Anger: When Your Back Is Against the Wall

Learn to keep anger from being destructive.

Anger is a natural, God-given emotion, which, though potentially harmful, can be used constructively. Everyone experiences the emotion of anger, so we must learn how to deal with it in a healthy and righteous way. The Psalms give us examples of godly ways to express anger.

Scripture:

Psalm 79:1–13

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Anger in and of itself is not bad; God created us to get angry sometimes. The key is learning how to express anger without it being destructive; it can even be constructive. Psalm 79 sheds light on anger and healthy ways to deal with it.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We feel anger when we believe that we've been wronged, which leads us to want vindication.

Teaching point two: In dealing with our anger, we must first admit we are angry.

Teaching point three: We need to seek forgiveness for our own role in the situation.

Teaching point four: We need to leave room for God to work.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Psalm 79 doesn't give us a step-by-step formula for dealing with our anger, but it does assure us of God's presence at all times. By watching how the psalmist deals with his anger, we gain insight into how to deal with our own.

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 6

LEADER'S GUIDE

Contentment: When Your Soul Is at Rest

Learn to find serenity, regardless of the circumstances.

How we can be at peace with our lives, ourselves, and our God? Psalm 62 offers ways to find inner rest despite our outer circumstances. The secret of contentment is looking to God rather than your circumstances to give you fulfillment and peace.

Scripture:

Psalm 62:1-12

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

One of the characters on a *Seinfeld* episode was worried about his high blood pressure. So his cardiologist gave him a meditation tape to listen to that suggested he should say, "Serenity now" every time he felt stressed. By the end of the episode all the *Seinfeld* characters were saying, "Serenity now, serenity now." If only it were that simple.

Serenity, or contentment, is something we all long for, but not something we find easily, because we are a restless people. We have an inner longing that makes us constantly feel discontent. We also live in a culture that purposefully creates discontent.

What is contentment? It's a condition in which our soul is at rest regardless of our circumstances. A soul at rest implies that our soul isn't striving for something it doesn't have. Contentment is a type of peace that persists through both pleasant and difficult situations.

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] What has brought you contentment in the past? Did it last?
- [Q] What do you imagine it would take to make you content?
- [Q] How can we have contentment when everything is chaotic or going wrong?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We will find contentment by looking to God instead of to our circumstances.

Psalm 62, attributed to King David, talks about contentment. Read verses 1–4.

The Hebrew word for "rest" here means "silence" or "stillness." David finds his soulful rest in God alone because his circumstances are unreliable. God is as immovable as a rock and as protecting as a fortress, so David is confident that he won't be shaken.

David finds that his circumstances are not to be trusted to provide contentment, so instead he looks to the God who made him. God is the only source of true contentment; in him alone will we find rest for our souls.

Augustine lived in the fifth century after Jesus. He lived a promiscuous life, chasing sexual pleasures and all that affluence had to offer. He fathered a child outside of marriage, and he even joined a cult. But he found himself empty, with a restless soul. So he started attending a church led by a famous pastor named Ambrose.

Augustine attended as a seeker, primarily because he was fascinated by what Ambrose had to say. But eventually Augustine found faith in Jesus Christ. He would later write in his journal, “Our hearts are restless until they find rest in you, O Lord.”

Only in God will our souls find true rest.

- [Q] How and why do our souls find rest in God (v. 1)?
- [Q] How is God like a rock and a fortress (v. 2)?
- [Q] According to verses 3–4, what were the psalmist’s circumstances like?
 - What difference did that make to his ability to be content?

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To teach us to look to God instead of circumstances for contentment.*

Activity: *Advise the following people on how they can find contentment from God in spite of their circumstances.*

- *Julius grew up poor and has always wanted to prove to the world that he is not that little boy from the ghetto. He is trying to climb the corporate ladder at breakneck speed.*
- *Alyssa just learned her mother has cancer.*
- *William would like to go on the mission field, but he can’t get his support raised.*
- *Katie was overlooked for a job promotion.*
- *Frank’s girlfriend just broke up with him.*

Teaching point two: We will find contentment by choosing to trust in God.

Read Psalm 62:5–8. Though David says he finds rest only in God in verse 1, he commands himself to find rest in God in verse 5. One moment we can be where we need to be, but then the next moment we’re struggling again. Read Mark 9:24 and look again at Psalm 62:8.

The Hebrew word for “trust” means to rely on God, as a baby relies on its mother. We must move from looking to God to placing our trust in him. Trusting God means establishing a relationship with him through Jesus Christ.

- [Q] Have you ever commanded yourself to rest in God? Did it work? Why or why not?
- [Q] What kind of things do you have trouble trusting to God?

Teaching point three: We will find contentment by pursuing a life of integrity.

Read Psalm 62:9–10.

David notes that, whether we’re rich or poor, we’re all essentially the same—each of our lives ultimately amounts to nothing. We shouldn’t put stock in our circumstances or wealth, because

then we're not trusting God. Rather than focus on wealth, we should live lives of integrity. Integrity is a consistency between what we say and what we do.

Danny Graves, a closing pitcher for the Cincinnati Reds, lost his wallet during a road trip to San Diego. The guy cleaning the Reds' bus found his wallet. This man not only sent the wallet to Graves in the mail, but he also converted the \$1,500 cash inside the wallet to traveler's checks in case they got lost in the mail. Graves said he was flabbergasted that someone would be so honest and go to such lengths to get him his money back.

We commonly think that integrity comes from being honest in the big things, like finding \$1,500 that doesn't belong to us. But what we forget is that we're only honest in the big things if we've been honest consistently in the little things. Pursuing integrity means developing habits and patterns of life that have integrity.

[Q] How would you define integrity?

[Q] How can wealth actually destroy our contentment?

[Q] Most of us are tempted to set our hearts on wealth (v. 10). How can we avoid doing that?

Teaching point four: We will find contentment by understanding God's character.

Read Psalm 62:11–12.

David focuses on God's strength, his unlimited power. He also calls attention to God's love, his loyal faithfulness to his promises. It takes an understanding of both God's power and God's love to get a picture of what he's like—otherwise God becomes either a tyrant or Santa Claus.

The more you understand God, the more content you will be.

[Q] Do you lean more toward thinking of God as a tyrant or as Santa Claus?

- How can you become more balanced in your view of God?
- How does knowing God is both strong and loving help you to be content?

[Q] How does knowing that God will ultimately reward us, even if that means in heaven, help us to be content with our circumstances now?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

The contented life doesn't come from having just the right circumstances. Contentment comes from looking to God as our one source of serenity. We must move from looking to God to actually trusting him with our lives.

We must move from trusting him to living a life of integrity for him.

We must move from a life of integrity to a life of understanding.

Action Point: What makes you most discontent right now? Confess it to the group and encourage one another with how God can give contentment in that situation.

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 6

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Contentment: When Your Soul Is at Rest

Learn to find serenity, regardless of the circumstances.

How we can be at peace with our lives, ourselves, and our God? Psalm 62 offers ways to find inner rest despite our outer circumstances. The secret of contentment is looking to God rather than your circumstances to give you fulfillment and peace.

Scripture:

Psalm 62:1-12

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

What is contentment? It's a condition in which our soul is at rest regardless of our circumstances. A soul at rest implies that our soul isn't striving for something it doesn't have. Contentment is a type of peace that persists through both pleasant and difficult situations.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We will find contentment by looking to God instead of to our circumstances.

Teaching point two: We will find contentment by choosing to trust in God.

Teaching point three: We will find contentment by pursuing a life of integrity.

Teaching point four: We will find contentment by understanding God's character.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

The contented life doesn't come from having just the right circumstances. Contentment comes from looking to God as our one source of serenity. We must move from looking to God to actually trusting him with our lives.

We must move from trusting him to living a life of integrity for him.

We must move from a life of integrity to a life of understanding.

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 7

LEADER'S GUIDE

Depression: When Darkness Is Your Closest Friend

Learn to live victoriously when just living is hard.

The psalms help show us how we can find hope in even the deepest depression. In times of depression, we must cry out to God for hope and forgiveness, seek community with his people, and look to him for an eternal perspective.

Scripture:

Psalm 88:1-18

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

Depression is a depth of sadness that goes beyond the normal sadness people experience as they go through life. Between 13 million and 14 million Americans suffer from depression each year. Sixteen percent of Americans will struggle with a major bout of depression at some point in their lives. There is no one cause for depression—physical, circumstantial, spiritual, and psychological factors contribute to it. Though Christians are as susceptible to depression as anyone, many Christians hide their depression, thinking it is an issue of morality.

Read Psalm 88, which sheds light on what depression feels like.

When we're depressed, we become fixated on death and dying.

When we're depressed, we feel like we've failed (v. 7).

Like the psalmist, we have a tendency to feel guilty for things that were not our fault (vv. 14–16). People suffering from depression feel like failures, and assume their misery is the due consequence.

When we're depressed, we feel completely alone (vv. 8, 18). The psalmist's friends have left him, perhaps assuming he has done something to incur his depression. When we're depressed, we feel utterly alone. We are unable—and don't want to—connect with those around us.

When we're depressed, we lose all perspective (v. 9).

Eyes that are dim with grief become blind to the good things in life (v. 15).

All the psalmist's memories of his life are of affliction, terror, suffering, and despair. Depression distorts our perception of the world.

Discussion Starters:

[Q] Do you battle depression? If so, how do you handle it?

[Q] Why might Christians think that they shouldn't be depressed?

- Is that a reasonable assumption? Why or why not?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We must seek God for answers.

Depression can be caused by a number of things. It may simply be a chemical imbalance in the body. It could be difficult circumstances that cause a person to lose hope that their life will get better. For some it's hidden anger that they've turned in on themselves. For others, it's a spiritual darkness.

Read Psalm 88:1, 9, and 13.

The psalmist looks to God for answers, even though no answers have come by the end of the song. Looking to God for answers doesn't mean refusing the good gifts that God gives us through the discoveries of science. It just means that we continue to seek him as we look for ways to overcome our depression.

[Q] Consider our psalmist. Is seeking God a guaranteed cure for depression? Why or why not?

- If not, how can seeking God help us in the midst of our depression?

[Q] What can we learn from the fact that the psalmist cried out to God day and night?

Teaching point two: We must find a living hope in the face of death.

Read Psalm 88:10–12.

The psalmist has no prospect of hope beyond the grave. We have a great advantage over him because Christ clearly showed us that there is life after death. Read 1 Peter 1:3.

Our living hope is anchored in the reality of Jesus Christ's resurrection. No matter how bad things get in this life, we are assured that life will be better one day.

[Q] What comfort is there in knowing that this life is not all there is?

- Does that mean we just give up and suffer through until we die? Explain.

Teaching point three: We must find the answer of God's forgiveness in the face of failure.

Depression is not a sin, but depression can come as a result of our sins. Read 1 John 1:9 and 1 John 3:19–20.

Confession is good for our souls because it opens us to God's forgiveness and sets our hearts at rest in his presence.

[Q] How might failure to confess our sins result in depression?

[Q] If we do confess our sin, how can we handle the false guilt that may continue to plague us (1 John 1:9)?

Leader's Note: *The promise in this verse is that if we confess, God will forgive. If we continue to be plagued by guilt for that sin, that guilt is not from God, who has wiped our slate clean.*

[Q] How can we set our hearts at rest in his presence (1 John 3:19)?

[Q] What does it mean that God is greater than our hearts (1 John 3:20)?

Teaching point four: We must find authentic community in the face of aloneness.

Our impulse when we're sad is to isolate ourselves, but it's at that moment that we need others most. Read Romans 12:15.

Real community comes when we're willing to hurt with another person. God created his church to be an authentic community—a community where all of us are helping each other as we go through different seasons.

- [Q] The tendency to isolate yourself may be a clue that you are depressed. How can you counteract the desire to withdraw from people?
- [Q] What do you think authentic community is like?
- [Q] Are you willing to hurt with another person?
 - How might doing so help lift your depression?

Teaching point five: We must find an eternal perspective in the face of our shortsightedness.

Scripture helps lift our eyes to what is beyond the horizon even before we can see it. Read James 1:2–4.

Understanding how troubles function in our lives helps us endure them with hope and even joy.

- [Q] How can we possibly consider our trials a joy (James 1:2)?
- [Q] How can perseverance finish its work (James 1:4)?
- [Q] Does being mature and complete mean that you no longer struggle? Why or why not?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Should we seek professional help for depression? Many Christians are unsure whether seeking professional help means they are not relying on God. Usually this internal struggle stems from a belief that depression is a moral weakness or sin, which it usually is not. Because there are so many factors that contribute to depression, it makes sense to explore all the possible causes.

Psalm 88 shows us that, in times of deep sadness, we need to seek God for answers, cry out to him for a living hope, ask him for forgiveness, seek community with his people, and look to him for perspective.

The actress Marilyn Monroe battled depression all of her life. When she married playwright Arthur Miller, it was a prescription for disaster, as Miller also struggled with depression. In his autobiography, *Timebends*, Arthur Miller described what it was like to watch Marilyn as she descended into the despair of depression. One evening, after a doctor gave Marilyn yet another

injection to help her sleep, Miller stood watching her. He writes, "I found myself straining to imagine miracles ... What if she were to wake and I was able to say, 'God loves you, darling,' and she were able to believe it! How I wished I still had my religion and she hers."

Our faith does not eliminate the potential for depression, but it does help us to walk through it with hope and strength.

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To help us learn to recognize the many causes of depression.*

Activity: *Suggest whether the following people's depression might be caused by physical (chemical), spiritual, psychological, or circumstantial reasons.*

- *Anne came from an abusive home.*
- *Michael used drugs extensively as a young man. He quit using drugs, but still struggles with depression.*
- *Lisa's last child just left for college.*
- *Conner is in a dead-end job that he hates.*
- *Teresa has been dabbling in occult activities.*
- *Sheila struggled with anorexia as a teenager. She is eating healthily now but still battles depression.*
- *Brett treated his family terribly, but refuses to admit it to himself, covering his guilt in workaholism.*

Action Point: Practice authentic community and listen to those in your group. Break into pairs and ask each other whether they are struggling with depression. Share some of the reasons why that may be the case and pray about it together.

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 7

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Depression: When Darkness Is Your Closest Friend

Learn to live victoriously when just living is hard.

The psalms help show us how we can find hope in even the deepest depression. In times of depression, we must cry out to God for hope and forgiveness, seek community with his people, and look to him for an eternal perspective.

Scripture:

Psalm 88:1-18

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Depression is a depth of sadness that goes beyond the normal sadness people experience as they go through life. Between 13 million and 14 million Americans suffer from depression each year. Sixteen percent of Americans will struggle with a major bout of depression at some point in their lives. There is no one cause for depression—physical, circumstantial, spiritual, and psychological factors contribute to it. Though Christians are as susceptible to depression as anyone, many Christians hide their depression, thinking it is an issue of morality.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We must seek God for answers.

Teaching point two: We must find a living hope in the face of death.

Teaching point three: We must find the answer of God's forgiveness in the face of failure.

Teaching point four: We must find authentic community in the face of aloneness.

Teaching point five: We must find an eternal perspective in the face of our shortsightedness.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Should we seek professional help for depression? Many Christians are unsure whether seeking professional help means they are not relying on God. Usually this internal struggle stems from a belief that depression is a moral weakness or sin, which it usually is not. Because there are so many factors that contribute to depression, it makes sense to explore all the possible causes.

Psalm 88 shows us that, in times of deep sadness, we need to seek God for answers, cry out to him for a living hope, ask him for forgiveness, seek community with his people, and look to him for perspective.

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 8

LEADER'S GUIDE

Disappointment: When Your Dreams Die

Learn how to handle the pain of what might have been.

How we can find peace when our dreams have been shattered? Psalm 107 offers hope to those disappointed with life. By paying attention to God's response to those who experience disappointment—whether through opportunities gone awry, painful circumstances, their own rebellion, or broken dreams—we can gain insight into his great love.

Scripture:

Psalm 107:1–43

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

The harshness of life soon shows us that our dreams rarely come true.

In the musical version of Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*, the character Fantine sings a sorrowful song about disappointment, called "I Dreamed a Dream." The song begins with the words, "I dreamed a dream in time gone by; when hopes were high and life worth living."

She goes on to describe her youthful vigor as she chased pleasure and fell in love. But an unexpected pregnancy and the departure of her baby's father made her dreams come crashing down. As a single mom in 19th-century France, she found it difficult to survive.

She worked in a factory for a while, but then she was fired because the foreman found out about her child. She sold her hair and her teeth to pay her rent, and finally she had nothing else to sell but herself. She ended up on the streets as a prostitute, a hollow shell of what she had been.

Eventually, Fantine dies from the sicknesses she contracted as a prostitute. The song ends with the words, "I had a dream my life would be, so different from this hell I'm living; so different now from what it seemed; now life has killed the dream I dreamed."

Psalms 107 was written during one of Israel's biggest disappointments. Israel was punished for her infidelity to God by being invaded by the Babylonians, yet God brought his nation back to their land after 70 years of exile.

Israel dreamed of reestablishing her former prominence and rebuilding the temple—but only a portion of the people returned and the new temple was not impressive. What should have been a time of rejoicing instead was filled with weeping and disappointment. Psalm 107 reflects the disappointment of a people whose dreams have died.

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] Have you ever had a dream die? How did it affect you?
- [Q] What kind of expectations did you have as a child or young person that you now realize was unrealistic?
- [Q] Give an example of when you, or someone you know of, turned a dying dream into a blessing.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Sometimes open doors lead to desert places.

Read Psalm 107:1–3.

This song is addressed to the “redeemed” of the Lord, which connotes the Lord’s redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Verse three brings the focus back to the present—a disappointing return from exile.

Read Psalm 107:4–9.

Any mention of wanderings in the desert reminded the Israelites of their 40 years in the wilderness—a time when they longed to return to slavery in Egypt because at least that was predictable. Read Numbers 14:2–4 and 21:5.

Sometimes promising opportunities are not as appealing as they looked when we first decided to step through the door. But just because an open door leads to a desert doesn’t mean it was the wrong door. Sometimes promising opportunities are only doors to desert experiences, but God has a plan for our good through it all.

- [Q] What did the Israelites expect when God led them miraculously out of Egypt?
 - Why didn’t it happen the way they thought it would?
- [Q] Has God ever led you into something that proved to be difficult? How did you handle it?
- [Q] What does God teach us through disappointment?
- [Q] How did the psalmist start this psalm?
 - What is the significance of that, since this psalm is about disappointment?

Teaching point two: Sometimes painful circumstances lead us to dark places.

Read Psalm 107:10–16.

The Israelites were enslaved to the Babylonians just as they had been to the Egyptians, yet God rescued them when they cried to him.

The account of Daniel in the Bible is the story of a young nobleman who was deported to Babylon and persecuted for worshiping God, yet God protected Daniel and rewarded him for his integrity. At times he surely must have wondered what God was doing.

Several hundred years after the birth of Christ, a 15-year-old boy named Patrick lived in England. When his parents were away, he was taken captive by raiders and sold into slavery in Ireland, where he worked as a shepherd. Yet in that dark place, Patrick’s faith grew until he finally was able to escape Ireland, return to England, and become a pastor. The irony of Patrick’s story is that he returned as the first Christian missionary to Ireland.

Sometimes life leads us to dark places, yet God grows new dreams and opportunities from other dreams that have died.

- [Q] Do you know any stories of miserable circumstances that had good results?
- [Q] According to verses 10 and 11, what reason might there be for painful circumstances?

- [Q] If our miserable circumstances are because of our own sin, what might God want us to do (v. 13)?
- [Q] What does it do to our hearts to give thanks to God in spite of our painful circumstances (v. 15)?

Teaching point three: Sometimes our rebellion leads us to disillusionment.

Read Psalm 107:17–22.

Some people willfully rebel against what they know is right, yet they find that these choices bring them affliction rather than fulfillment. Sometimes we kill our own dreams.

The path of rebellion is the path of despair and disillusionment. Philosophers refer to the “hedonistic paradox”: the reality that people who pursue pleasure tend to experience the least pleasure.

But the good news is that God can answer us in our despair, even if we have killed our own dreams.

- [Q] How can we become fools through our rebellious ways (v. 17)?
- [Q] How does rebellion cause us to draw near the gates of death (v. 18)?
- [Q] How does God heal us from our rebellion (v. 20)?
- [Q] Why do those who were the most rebellious often praise God the loudest when they return to him (v. 22)?

Teaching point four: Sometimes our biggest dreams lead us nowhere.

Read Psalm 107:23–32.

The psalmist sings of some Hebrew merchants who dared to brave the seas and were left praying for their lives after a terrible storm. Sometimes our highest ambitions come to nothing.

Charles Colson was a special aide to former president Richard Nixon. Colson had high ambitions and was ruthless in his pursuit of them, no matter what the cost. People frequently referred to him as Nixon’s “hatchet man,” the one who handled all of the President’s dirty work.

When the Watergate scandal came into the open, Colson went to prison for seven years, indicted for obstruction of justice. From the top of his class at George Washington University to a federal prison cell, Colson saw his big dreams come to nothing.

But he cried out to God in that prison cell, and God answered him. Upon his release, Colson became a well-respected Christian leader and author. He founded Prison Fellowship, which has helped thousands of inmates and their families find hope through Christ. His books have inspired us to be more passionate in our devotion to Jesus and more focused in our efforts to share the Good News. In 1993, Colson won the prestigious Templeton Award for progress in religion. His story shows that even when our high ambitions die, God is still with us.

- [Q] In what way are even the storms of life a testimony of God's power (vv. 24–25)?
- [Q] Give an example of when God stilled a “storm” you were going through to a whisper (v. 29)?
- [Q] Why should we share how God has proven his faithfulness to us with other Christians (v. 32)?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

God's love will never disappoint us. Read Psalm 107:43.

By paying attention to God's response to those who experience disappointment—whether through opportunities gone awry, painful circumstances, their own rebellion, or broken dreams—we can gain insight into his great love. God's love is like an anchor that holds us despite what we go through.

Some of our dreams will inevitably die, but God's love endures. His love will be your constant companion, regardless of your circumstances. We cannot live under the weight of what might have been—we must accept where we are and know God is right there with us.

- [Q] What difference does it make that God loves us when we are disappointed (v. 43)?

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To help us understand the depth of God's love for us.*

Activity: *Read Romans 8:28–39. Write down all the evidences of God's love for you according to these verses. When finished, discuss these and what they mean to you personally.*

Action Point: Share with the group a disappointment you are facing right now. As a group, pray that each person would know that God loves him or her, and that they would be reassured that he is working for good on their behalf.

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 8

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Disappointment: When Your Dreams Die

Learn how to handle the pain of what might have been.

How we can find peace when our dreams have been shattered? Psalm 107 offers hope to those disappointed with life. By paying attention to God's response to those who experience disappointment—whether through opportunities gone awry, painful circumstances, their own rebellion, or broken dreams—we can gain insight into his great love.

Scripture:

Psalm 107:1–43

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

The harshness of life soon shows us that our dreams rarely come true.

Psalms 107 was written during one of Israel's biggest disappointments. Israel was punished for her infidelity to God by being invaded by the Babylonians, yet God brought his nation back to their land after 70 years of exile.

Israel dreamed of reestablishing her former prominence and rebuilding the temple—but only a portion of the people returned and the new temple was not impressive. What should have been a time of rejoicing was instead filled with weeping and disappointment. Psalm 107 reflects the disappointment of a people whose dreams have died.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Sometimes open doors lead to desert places.

Teaching point two: Sometimes painful circumstances lead us to dark places.

Teaching point three: Sometimes our rebellion leads us to disillusionment.

Teaching point four: Sometimes our biggest dreams lead us nowhere.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

God's love will never disappoint us. By paying attention to God's response to those who experience disappointment—whether through opportunities gone awry, painful circumstances, their own rebellion, or broken dreams—we can gain insight into his great love. God's love is like an anchor that holds us despite what we go through.

Some of our dreams will inevitably die, but God's love endures. His love will be your constant companion, regardless of your circumstances. We cannot live under the weight of what might have been—we must accept where we are and know God is right there with us.

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 9

LEADER'S GUIDE

Uncertainty: When You're Not Sure of Your Next Move

Learn how to make wise decisions when the path ahead is unclear.

How can we ascertain God's will for our lives when we are unsure of what he wants? The Psalms helps those struggling with uncertainty to find God's direction for their lives. When we feel uncertain, we must listen for God's voice in creation, look for his direction in the Bible, ask for his conviction in our hearts, and then forge ahead with confidence.

Scripture:

Psalm 19:1-14

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

Uncertainty is a problem faced by people in all walks of life—whether it's the recent graduate looking for a job, the single person seeking a mate, the new couple considering starting a family, or the retiree looking for new purpose. It's simply hard to know what God wants us to do.

Uncertainty can be debilitating, but Psalm 19 offers guidance on how to make our decisions. Thankfully, God wants us to know him in the midst of our decisions so that he can direct us.

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] When have you faced the most uncertainty about your life?
 - How did you move past that uncertainty?
- [Q] Do you generally find it hard or easy to make decisions? Explain.
- [Q] How do you go about making decisions? What is your process?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: When we're uncertain, God speaks to us through his creation.

Read Psalm 19:1–6.

The psalm opens with a meditation on the creation account in Genesis. Creation is constantly declaring God's glory and continuously proclaiming God's work. Creation's constant declaration of God's greatness goes through all the earth; every language and culture hears this wordless sermon. As nothing is hidden from the sun's heat, nothing is exempt from creation's witness to the glory of God.

God never stops speaking to us through creation, and even speaks to us through the advances we make by studying his creation. God's voice is not always as specific as we would like, but it can help us make decisions when we are uncertain.

- [Q] How does God's creation pour forth speech and display knowledge (v. 2)?
- [Q] How does creation speak to your heart?
- [Q] How does understanding that God created all things help us to trust him with life's uncertainties?

Teaching point two: When we're uncertain, God speaks to us through the Bible.

Read Psalm 19:7–11.

The psalmist shifts from using the title “God” to “LORD” or “Yahweh,” the name God revealed himself to Israel by. Perhaps this was to indicate that God was talking to them personally.

God's word is given many names: the law, statutes, precepts, commands, and ordinances.

- God's law is his instruction, and it is perfect, lacking nothing.
- God's statutes are trustworthy road signs to help us get our bearings.
- God's precepts are a map to help us navigate through life and its difficult decisions.
- God's commands are a moral compass that gives us a sense of absolutes.
- God's ordinances are his legal opinion of how each person's life should be determined.

As the psalmist reflects on all of these characteristics of the Bible, he views Scripture as infinitely valuable and pleasurable. The Bible forms the boundaries for our decisions, which limits our options and provides some certainty. If we allow the Bible to play its role in our lives, it revives our souls, makes us wise, gives joy to our hearts, enlightens us, and grants us integrity.

[Q] How does Scripture revive our soul when we are uncertain (v. 7)?

- How does it make us wise, leading to better decisions (v. 7)?

[Q] How can we experience joy, even when we are not certain of our future (v. 8)?

- How can we be confident that God will help us make good decisions (v. 8)?

[Q] Why is the fear of the Lord necessary for us to make wise decisions (v. 9)?

[Q] Why do we need to see God's Word as more precious than gold in order to make good decisions (v. 10)?

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To demonstrate what we know from the Bible.*

Activity: *We know an enormous amount about God's will for our lives through Scripture. Brainstorm as a group all the things we know God wants for us from things he has told us in the Bible. Record the answers on a poster board or whiteboard. After you've run out of ideas, discuss how those things help direct us in decisions we must make.*

Teaching point three: When we're uncertain, God speaks to us through his conviction.

Read Psalm 19:12–13.

The psalmist asks who can determine his or her own blind spots, which is clearly a rhetorical question. Only God can search through the mixed and tangled mass of motives within our hearts. The songwriter asks God to forgive him of his hidden faults, the sins he has committed secretly. He also asks that the sins he has committed in willful rebellion not become habitual and take dominion over him. The end result of the psalmist's confession and purification will not be sinless perfection, but integrity. God's conviction through the Holy Spirit exposes our sins and delivers us from them. Read John 16:7–8.

When faced with a decision, we cannot easily know whether our inclination is from God or our own selfishness; we can never underestimate our heart's capability to deceive itself. But God's conviction helps us sort through our motives and make decisions with integrity.

[Q] How do you determine whether an idea is from God or of your own making?

- Give an example of how you've made that distinction in the past.

[Q] Why does the psalmist ask God to forgive his hidden faults?

- What effect would that have on a person's decision-making ability?

[Q] Give an example of how the Holy Spirit has convicted you of sin.

[Q] Give an example of how the Holy Spirit has led you in a specific decision.

Teaching point four: When we're uncertain, we should pursue the path most honoring to God.

Read Psalm 19:14.

A life of integrity is an alignment of our inner life with our outer life. A West African proverb goes: "The man who tries to walk two roads will split his pants."³

Some paths honor God more than others, so we seek the higher way even though it may not be as popular or easy as others.

[Q] Give an example of when you chose to do something that honored God over another path that did not do so.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

All of us deal with uncertainty at times. Psalm 19 invites us to listen for God's voice in creation, look for his direction in the Bible, ask for his conviction in our hearts, and then choose the path that most honors him. Though our decisions may not always be easy, they will at least be clearer.

³ Heard in conversation by Janet Weiss's father, a missionary to the Maninka tribe.

God's plan for our lives is not a straight line—it is a series of twists and turns. We should be confident of the fact that he is powerful enough to get us back on the right track if we make a wrong decision.

[Q] What do we do if we've made a wrong decision? Is there ever anything that God cannot redeem?

Action Point: Share with the group one decision you need to make. It can be a big, life-changing decision, or it may be a simple, everyday decision. Ask the group for their advice as to which path they think most honors God and is aligned with the truth in Scripture. Pray about it for the next week or so and ask the Holy Spirit to confirm it in your heart.

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 9

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Uncertainty: When You're Not Sure of Your Next Move

Learn how to make wise decisions when the path ahead is unclear.

How can we ascertain God's will for our lives when we are unsure of what he wants? The Psalms helps those struggling with uncertainty to find God's direction for their lives. When we feel uncertain, we must listen for God's voice in creation, look for his direction in the Bible, ask for his conviction in our hearts, and then forge ahead with confidence.

Scripture:

Psalm 19:1-14

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Uncertainty is a problem faced by people in all walks of life—whether it's the recent graduate looking for a job, the single person seeking a mate, the new couple considering starting a family, or the retiree looking for new purpose. It's simply hard to know what God wants us to do.

Uncertainty can be debilitating, but Psalm 19 offers guidance on how to make our decisions. Thankfully, God wants us to know him in the midst of our decisions so that he can direct us.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: When we're uncertain, God speaks to us through his creation.

Teaching point two: When we're uncertain, God speaks to us through the Bible.

Teaching point three: When we're uncertain, God speaks to us through his conviction.

Teaching point four: When we're uncertain, we should pursue the path most honoring to God.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

All of us deal with uncertainty at times. Psalm 19 invites us to listen for God's voice in creation, look for his direction in the Bible, ask for his conviction in our hearts, and then choose the path that most honors him. Though our decisions may not always be easy, they will at least be clearer.

God's plan for our lives is not a straight line—it is a series of twists and turns. We should be confident of the fact that he is powerful enough to get us back on the right track if we make a wrong decision.

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 10

LEADER'S GUIDE

Restlessness: When You Still Haven't Found What You're Looking For

Learn the cause of—and cure—for our incessant inner hunger.

What causes restlessness, and how we can find contentment in the midst of it? We will all feel restless until the consummation of the kingdom of God, but we can find contentment until then by putting our security in Jesus.

Scripture:

Psalm 42:1–11

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

No matter how long we've been following Jesus, there's still a restless ache that lives deep within our hearts. Restlessness can cause people to make sudden, life-changing decisions—both good and bad. Psalm 42 offers three possible causes of restlessness.

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] Has restlessness ever caused you to make a bad decision? Explain.
- [Q] What kind of restlessness is normal and when does it cross over into irresponsibility? Give examples.
- [Q] In what way can restlessness be good?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We're restless because our small taste of God leaves us hungering for more.

Read Psalm 42:1–2.

Just as a deer is relentless in its quest for the cold water of a stream, the psalmist's soul is relentless in its thirst for God. Like a living stream that flows even in the dryness of summer, the living God is a source of hope and peace in the dry times of life. Tasting of God's goodness fills us, but it also makes us hungry for more. Read 1 Peter 2:2–3.

We long to taste God's love and peace, but we settle for cheap and unsatisfying substitutes. Every person must learn that only God can satisfy the deep thirst in each of us. Even when we taste of God's goodness, we taste only enough to make us long for more.

- [Q] Give examples of things we use to try to quench our thirst for God. These can be anything from addictions to religious rituals.
- [Q] In what way is it good to still be thirsty for God?
 - What helps you quench that thirst?

Teaching point two: We're restless because our problems cause us to doubt God's promises.

Read Psalm 42:3–10.

Though the psalmist thirsts for the living water of the living God, he can only taste the salt of his own tears, and the waterfalls of chaos have swept over him. In the chaos of life's problems, we forget God's promises and wonder if he will really do all he said he would. We may know the right thing to believe in our heads, but our hearts doubt and struggle to accept it.

- [Q] Can you relate to the psalmist's inner crisis here? In what ways does this reflect your life?
- [Q] When is it most difficult to move past your suffering and just trust God?
- [Q] Why does the psalmist remember the Lord when his soul is downcast (v. 6)? What would that do for him?
- [Q] In what way does God direct you with his love (v. 8)?
- [Q] Underneath all the pain, is God still your Rock (v. 9)? How?

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To help us learn to trust God's promises.*

Activity: *Suggest a promise that God has given us in the Bible for each of the following problems.*

- *Jeremiah, who is seven, lost his father in a car accident.*
- *Helen's husband has left her for another woman.*
- *Doug was laid off from his job.*
- *Sandy was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis.*
- *Eric lost his savings in a scam.*

Teaching point three: We're restless because our salvation has not yet been completed.

Read Psalm 42:11.

The songwriter is a believer in God, yet he looks forward to future salvation. We have salvation; yet we have not yet fully received the salvation Jesus died to give us. Although Jesus made our salvation sure and certain, our salvation won't be complete until he returns again at the end of the age.

Some people overemphasize the "not-yet" aspects of Christianity; they believe that only in heaven will we experience fulfillment in God. Some people overemphasize the "already" aspects of Christianity; they expect God to do things he has never promised to do in this life. Read 1 Corinthians 13:12.

We live in a time between the ages—between the inauguration of Christ's kingdom at his birth and its consummation at his Second Coming—so we feel the tension between the "already" and the "not yet."

Learning to hear is a gradual process. Theologians use a phrase to talk about how Christ-followers are already redeemed, but will not experience the fullness of redemption until we live with God in heaven. It's called "the already and the not yet." How does that work exactly?

Josie Caven, a little girl in England, was born profoundly deaf. Growing up, she often felt isolated because of her inability to hear, but that changed after receiving a cochlear implant during the Christmas season. At the age of 12, she heard clearly for the first time. The first sound she heard was the song "Jingle Bells" coming from the radio.

Was Josie's hearing restored? Yes—completely. Was she hearing well immediately? Not exactly. Her mother said, "She is having to learn what each new sound is and what it means. She will ask, 'Was that a door closing?' and has realized for the first time that the light in her room hums when it is switched on. She even knows what her name sounds like now, because before she could not hear the soft 'S' sound in the middle of the word. Seeing her face light up as she hears everything around her is all I could have wished for this Christmas."⁴

Josie's hearing was restored, but that restoration introduced her to the daily adventure of learning to distinguish each new sound in the hearing world. It's the already, and the not yet.

More of the already and the not yet are:

- We are forgiven, but not sinless.
- We know the truth, but still have doubts and questions.
- We live in mortal bodies, but look to the perfect, immortal bodies God will give us.

[Q] What does verse 11 reveal about the Psalmist's overall opinion of his situation?

[Q] Why does God leave mysteries in his truths?

[Q] Can you think of any other things about the Christian life that are already and not yet?

[Q] Look again at 1 Corinthians 13:12. What kind of things do you think you see dimly now that you look forward to understanding clearly in heaven?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

As followers of Jesus, we live in "restless contentment"—we are content with the fact that we're secure in Jesus, yet restless because the final chapter has not yet been written. Like a bride-to-be, the church awaits the consummation of her love for her Bridegroom.

[Q] How can we live our lives full of eagerness without impatience, restlessness without rejection of Christ?

Action Point: Close in group prayer, requesting that God would address your restlessness with his promises of everlasting hope and eternal security. Pray that when you are amidst

⁴ "Christmas Carols Music to the Ears of Deaf Girl," Yorkshireposttoday.com.

difficult times, Christ will remind you that he will come again on a white horse, triumphant and mighty, the “King of Kings and Lord of Lords,” proclaiming, “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades” (Rev. 1:17–18).

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 10

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Restlessness: When You Still Haven't Found What You're Looking For

Learn the cause of—and cure—for our incessant inner hunger.

What causes restlessness, and how we can find contentment in the midst of it? We will all feel restless until the consummation of the kingdom of God, but we can find contentment until then by putting our security in Jesus.

Scripture:

Psalm 42:1–11

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

No matter how long we've been following Jesus, there's still a restless ache that lives deep within our hearts. Restlessness can cause people to make sudden, life-changing decisions—both good and bad. Psalm 42 offers three possible causes of restlessness.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We're restless because our small taste of God leaves us hungering for more.

Teaching point two: We're restless because our problems cause us to doubt God's promises.

Teaching point three: We're restless because our salvation has not yet been completed.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

As followers of Jesus, we live in “restless contentment”—we are content with the fact that we're secure in Jesus, yet restless because the final chapter has not yet been written. Like a bride-to-be, the church awaits the consummation of her love for her Bridegroom.

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 11

LEADER'S GUIDE

Outrage: When Your Heart Is Filled with Revenge

Learn to forgive when you want to fight back.

We need to learn what causes outrage, how it affects us, and how we can resolve it. To do that we have to process our feelings of outrage and overcome our bitterness. God doesn't expect us to pretend our outrage isn't real. He does expect us to resist the temptation to return evil for evil, to work for reconciliation, to leave room for his wrath, and to overcome evil with good.

Scripture:

Psalm 137:1-9

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

Many things can provoke outrage in us. Outrage goes beyond the emotion of anger—it is more like hatred or an intense horror and rage at injustice.

A certain type of psalm—the imprecatory psalm—deals specifically with the emotion of outrage, and Psalm 137 is the most well known of these psalms. Read Psalm 137:1–4.

The psalmist had ample reason for feeling outraged—he wrote during Israel's exile to Babylon. Read Lamentations 5:11 and Zechariah 14:2 to find out why this caused him such outrage.

The Israelites were placed in work camps and forced to rebuild southern Babylon, and, as they worked, their captors tormented them. This psalm was probably composed in response to the guards' demand that the captives sing them the old songs of Zion as they worked.

What causes outrage within us?

We experience outrage when others oppress us. So long as there is oppression, there will be outrage.

The 20th century saw some of the worst oppression in human history. Consider, for example, the half-million Armenian Christians who were slaughtered by Turkish soldiers in 1915. Or the Russian revolution of 1917, when 1 million people were killed by their own government and virtually every pastor in Russia was either executed or sent to a labor camp.

Consider the cultural revolution in China, where 2 million people were brutalized. Or the Holocaust during World War II, when 6 million Jewish people were exterminated. And think of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia during the 1970s, when between 1 million and 3 million people were murdered. Or the genocide in Rwanda in the mid-1990s that claimed the lives of more than 1 million people. Or the Serbian attempt to purge their land of Albanians in the 1990s.

Oppression is clearly alive and well in our world.

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] What is your earliest memory of feeling outraged?
- [Q] Name one thing that makes you feel outrage now.
- [Q] Do you think outrage is good or bad? Explain.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles**Teaching point one: We must express our outrage to God.**

Read Psalm 137:5–6.

The psalmist vowed never to forget what happened to him, to never forget his allegiance to Jerusalem. The songwriter's identity and land were taken from him. We are outraged when what we consider priceless is forcibly taken from us, whether it's our home, family, personhood, or innocence. When we experience outrage, we want revenge. Read Psalm 137:7–9.

The word "remember" is a legal term that invokes God as the judge of an accusation. The psalmist's blessing on anyone who dashes a Babylonian baby against the rocks is horrifying, but demonstrates the outrage he felt. When we are outraged, we want our oppressors to suffer, to feel our pain.

An illustration of our desire for revenge when we've been wronged comes in the movie *Forrest Gump*. Forrest's friend Jenny was sexually violated and abused by her father, which set her on a path of sexual promiscuity and self-destruction. At one point in the movie, Jenny returns to her hometown and, with Forrest, revisits her childhood home. As she looks at the house, the outrage that's been locked in her heart suddenly comes bursting out. She picks up rocks and starts throwing them at the old house. She finally runs out of rocks and falls to the ground, crying. Forrest says, "Sometimes, I guess, there just aren't enough rocks."

For a person who wants to get even, there are never enough rocks.

It troubles us that the psalmist brought such extreme outrage before a holy God. We are used to censoring our prayers, making them more palatable for God. The first step to working through our outrage is to express it to God, to stop pretending it's not there. We must admit our outrage and lay it bare before God.

[Q] Have you ever been as honest with God as this psalmist was?

- What does such honesty do to our outrage?

Leader's Note: *It allows God to console us that he sees the injustice that was done and will deal with it in his time and way. It can also reveal to us the hatred and bitterness in our hearts.*

[Q] Give an example of misplaced outrage.

- How might honesty with God reveal misplaced outrage?

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To encourage us to be honest with God.*

Activity: *Write your own psalm of outrage over something that happened to you personally, in society, or in the world. This should be for your own use. Do not share them with the group.*

Teaching point two: We must resist the urge to respond to evil with evil.

When we feel the urge to get even, we want to respond to evil with evil—but Jesus explicitly forbids his followers to do this. Christian mathematician and theologian Blaise Pascal said, “People never do evil so cheerfully as when they do it in God’s name.”

Jesus refused to respond with evil when he was treated unjustly at the hands of the Roman government, and he calls those who trust him to follow his example and resist the urge to strike back.

We must seek reconciliation in our relationships, even in our relationships with our enemies. Outrage naturally leads to bitterness, but bitterness will only allow the injustice to victimize us all over again. We’re able to work for reconciliation when we begin to understand the enormous power of Christ’s gift of salvation for us. Someone once told the English pastor John Wesley, “I never forgive.” John Wesley responded by saying, “Then I hope you never sin.”

Forgiveness is not easy, but reconciliation is a miracle that is possible with God. Read Romans 12:17–21.

- [Q] What does it mean to “do what is right in the eyes of everybody”? Does that mean we should just try to please everyone? If not, what does it mean?
- [Q] How can we aspire to live at peace with everyone, yet still battle injustice?
- [Q] Think of someone you feel outrage toward. How can you “feed them or give them something to drink”?
- [Q] Why is forgiveness crucial to reconciliation?
- [Q] Is reconciliation always possible? If not, how do we handle it?

Teaching point three: We must leave room for God’s wrath.

Look again at Romans 12:19.

We must release our urge to get even and leave it in God’s hands. God will be sure to see that ultimate justice is done.

Dean Meyers was the ninth victim of the snipers that terrorized the Washington, D.C., area in 2002. Paula Zahn of CNN interviewed the victim’s brother, Bob. She asked Bob, “I know ... that you’re a man of great faith. You have many strong convictions. But are you bitter about what happened to your brother?”

He responded, “It’s certainly something one has to be vigilant about, but no, I would not say that there’s a bitterness. I believe that those responsible will have to deal with the authorities God has instituted. First, God instituted human government ... and also God says that he’ll

avenge losses. So we defer to those two authorities and obey the Scripture that indicates that we're not to avenge ourselves."⁵

- [Q] How can we trust that God is in control when an authority over us is corrupt?
- [Q] Does God generally display his wrath in this life? Explain.
- [Q] How can we be patient and content when we don't see justice on Earth?
- [Q] How does knowing that the next life will be just give us patience now?

Teaching point four: We must overcome evil with good.

Responding to evil with evil causes us to be overcome by evil. We are called to overcome evil with good, as Jesus and the early church did.

A South African woman stood in an emotionally charged courtroom, listening to white police officers acknowledge the atrocities they had perpetrated in the name of apartheid. Officer van de Broek acknowledged his responsibility in the death of her son. Along with others, he had shot her 18-year-old son at point-blank range. He and the others partied while they burned his body, turning it over and over on the fire until it was reduced to ashes.

Eight years later, van de Broek and others arrived to seize her husband. A few [hours] later, shortly after midnight, van de Broek came to fetch the woman. He took her to a woodpile where her husband lay bound. She was forced to watch as they poured gasoline over his body and ignited the flames that consumed his body. The last words she heard her husband say were "Forgive them."

Now, van de Broek stood before her awaiting judgment. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission asked her what she wanted.

"I want three things," she said calmly. "I want Mr. van de Broek to take me to the place where they burned my husband's body. I would like to gather up the dust and give him a decent burial.

"Second, Mr. van de Broek took all my family away from me, and I still have a lot of love to give. Twice a month, I would like for him to come to the ghetto and spend a day with me so I can be a mother to him.

"Third, I would like Mr. van de Broek to know that he is forgiven by God, and that I forgive him, too. I would like someone to lead me to where he is seated, so I can embrace him and he can know my forgiveness is real."

As the elderly woman was led across the courtroom, van de Broek fainted, overwhelmed. Someone began singing "Amazing Grace." Gradually everyone joined in.

⁵ CNN.com, (10-24-02).

This woman understood that to be reconciled with God and to be reconciled with neighbors and enemies is to be free indeed.⁶

- [Q] Consider the three things the South African woman asked for. Talk about each thing and what it might do for Mr. van de Broek.
- [Q] Think of the person who is causing you outrage. What three things would you ask of them if they were in front of a court?
 - What would you hope that would do for them?
 - For you?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

God doesn't call us to pretend that evil is really good or to ignore the pain of injustice. But we must resist the temptation to avenge ourselves, work for reconciliation, leave room for God's wrath, and overcome evil with good. Those who follow Jesus must follow his example and respond to injustice with love.

Action Point: Form pairs. Share with the person you are paired with an outrage you feel. Pray for each other that you will be able to be honest with God, resist seeking revenge, work for reconciliation, leave room for God's wrath, and overcome evil with good. Ask your partner to ask you how you are doing with this a week from now.

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon

⁶ Stanley W. Green, *The Canadian Mennonite* (9-4-00), p. 11.

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 11

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Outrage: When Your Heart Is Filled with Revenge

Learn to forgive when you want to fight back.

We need to learn what causes outrage, how it affects us, and how we can resolve it. To do that we have to process our feelings of outrage and overcome our bitterness. God doesn't expect us to pretend our outrage isn't real. He does expect us to resist the temptation to return evil for evil, to work for reconciliation, to leave room for his wrath, and to overcome evil with good.

Scripture:

Psalm 137:1-9

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Many things can provoke outrage in us. Outrage goes beyond the emotion of anger—it is more like hatred or an intense horror and rage at injustice.

A certain type of psalm—the imprecatory psalm—deals specifically with the emotion of outrage, and Psalm 137 is the most well known of these psalms.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We must express our outrage to God.

Teaching point two: We must resist the urge to respond to evil with evil.

Teaching point three: We must leave room for God's wrath.

Teaching point four: We must overcome evil with good.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

God doesn't call us to pretend that evil is really good or to ignore the pain of injustice. But we must resist the temptation to avenge ourselves, work for reconciliation, leave room for God's wrath, and overcome evil with good. Those who follow Jesus must follow his example and respond to injustice with love.

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 12

LEADER'S GUIDE

Praise: Find Joy in the Seasons of the Soul

Learn how and why to praise God at any place, any time, and in all ways.

We should praise God no matter what we are going through. So long as you have breath, praise God for who he is and what he does, in any and every possible way.

Scripture:

Psalm 150:1-6

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

Studying the Psalms can help us become more aware of our emotions. The Psalms are “an anatomy of all parts of the human soul.” As a review of emotions:

- Emotions are physical sensations combined with thoughts and beliefs about particular events and people.
- God has created us to experience physiological responses to what we feel; it is impossible to be human and not experience emotions.
- There is a mental component to emotions—what we feel is connected to what we think about people and things.
- Emotions are interplay between what's happening in our bodies and what's happening in our minds.

As a review of the Psalms:

- The Psalms are God-inspired prayers that God's people use to express their hearts to God.
- The Psalms are God's authority; they are God's direct communication with us.
- Unlike other books of the Bible, the Psalms are directed back to God and show us how God wants to be addressed.
- The Psalms have been read as prayers throughout the centuries.
- The Psalms show us the whole human heart exposed to God; within the book we find every season of the soul and every sort of emotion.

Read Psalm 150:1–6.

This song of praise is the doxology of Psalms; it was written to bring conclusion to the book. Psalm 150 gives us the basics of praise. As followers of God, we are called to praise him in all of life's circumstances. Read Hebrews 13:15.

We can sincerely praise God no matter what we are going through or feeling.

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] What makes you feel like praising God?
- [Q] Have you ever praised God in the middle of something bad? If so, what did it do for your attitude?
- [Q] How does praise influence our emotions?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We praise God in any place.

Read Psalm 150:1.

The songwriter urges us to praise God in the sanctuary and in “the heavens.” It is important that we worship in the fellowship of others. It is also important that we worship alone, joining with the angels in their praise of God. In other words, we are to praise God everywhere, from the darkest dungeon to the most beautiful cathedral.

[Q] How do you praise God with others?

[Q] How much of your prayers are praise and how much are asking for things?

- What do you think should be predominant? Why?

Teaching point two: We praise God because he is worthy.

Read Psalm 150:2.

The phrase “God’s acts of power” describes the miraculous things God has done for us, and “his surpassing greatness” describes his character. Like the psalmist, we can praise God for Creation and his acts of deliverance through history. Today, however, we can also praise him for the death of his Son as payment for our sins, and for the Resurrection.

We also praise God for who he is, because his character is behind all he does. When we begin to understand who God is, praise is a natural response. So it’s not just what he does for us, but who he is, that causes us to praise him.

Action Point: On a whiteboard or poster board, write down as many characteristics of God as you can think of. When your list is finished, praise him for all of those characteristics.

Teaching point three: We praise God in every way possible.

Many Christians argue over the best way to praise God. Read Psalm 150:3–5.

This psalm suggests that any and every instrument can be used to praise God; there is no “holiest” style of praise.

William Booth, who founded the Salvation Army, said:

Secular music, do you say, belongs to the devil? Does it? Well, if it did I would plunder him for it, for he has no right to a single note of the whole seven. Every note, and every strain, and every harmony is divine and belongs to us. So consecrate your voice and your instruments. Offer them to God, and use them to make all the hearts about you merry before the Lord.⁷

[Q] What type of music best helps you praise God? Why?

⁷ William Booth. "William and Catherine Booth," CHRISTIAN HISTORY, no. 26.

➤ Why do you think we have such different tastes in music?

[Q] Perhaps music doesn't help you praise God at all. If not, what does?

[Q] What parts of a worship service are ways to praise God?

Leader's Note: *Hopefully all of it. The music, the offering, the sermon, even the announcements should be praise to God.*

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Read Psalm 150:6.

Everything that is alive has breath, so everything alive should praise God. The Bible hints that even the earth will one day praise God. Read Isaiah 55:12.

In the end, everything and everyone will join in praise of God. We can praise God in every season of the soul. So long as you have breath, praise God no matter where you are, for who he is and what he does, and in any and every possible way.

Action Point: Take prayer requests for needs in your group. Turn each of those requests into a praise. For example, if a person has cancer, praise God that he is the Great Physician, or if someone's child is rebellious, praise God that he loves that child, and so on.

When finished, challenge each person to turn their prayer requests into praises this week.

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon

Study Through the Bible

Psalms: Managing Our Emotions - Study 12

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Praise: Find Joy in the Seasons of the Soul

Learn how and why to praise God at any place, any time, and in all ways.

We should praise God no matter what we are going through. So long as you have breath, praise God for who he is and what he does, in any and every possible way.

Scripture:

Psalm 150:1-6

Based on:

The sermon series "Managing Our Emotions" by Timothy Peck, PREACHINGTODAY.COM

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Studying the Psalms can help us become more aware of our emotions. The Psalms are “an anatomy of all parts of the human soul.”

But we can sincerely praise God no matter what we are going through or feeling.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We praise God in any place.

Teaching point two: We praise God because he is worthy.

Teaching point three: We praise God in every way possible.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Everything that is alive has breath, so everything alive should praise God. The Bible hints that even the earth will one day praise God. Read Isaiah 55:12.

In the end, everything and everyone will join in praise of God. We can praise God in every season of the soul. So long as you have breath, praise God no matter where you are, for who he is and what he does, and in any and every possible way.

Study by Timothy Peck, with JoHannah Reardon.

