

READ The BIBLE Together



Selected Psalms

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(Upholding the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith)

PSALMS

Introduction to the Book of Psalms

The Hebrew title of the Book of Psalms is 'praise'. In other words, the Book of Psalms is the book of praise. Now, that's an unusual title. Why do I say that?

Survey the 150 individual psalms and you will see that there are more *sad* psalms than *happy* psalms, more psalms of laments than psalms of praise! That being so, why is the Book of Psalms called the book of praise?

Survey the 150 individual psalms again and you will see this pattern emerging -- you will meet many sad psalms in the beginning, but as you move nearer to the end, the sad psalms decrease while the happy psalms increase!

[Psalm 3 is a psalm of lament, so is Psalm 4, Psalm 6, Psalm 7, Psalm 10, Psalm 12, Psalm 13, to mention just the first few. Psalm 146 is a psalm of praise, and so also is Psalm 147, Psalm 148, Psalm 149 and Psalm 150!]

The Book of Psalms moves from *lamentations* to *praise*, from the chords of sufferings to the choruses of praises. This is also true for almost all the psalms of laments. Almost all the sad psalms started sad, but will often end with joy or trust. Take **Psalm 3** as an example. It begins with lament – *LORD, how have they increased who trouble me!* It ends with praise – *Salvation belongs to the LORD, Your blessing is upon Your people.*

Coming back to look at the Book of Psalms, you will also see that the 150 psalms are actually grouped into five different books. Book I consists of Psalm 1-41, Book II consists of Psalm 42-72, Book III consists of Psalm 73-89, Book IV consists of Psalm 90-106 and Book V consists of Psalm 107-150. [Turn to your Bible and verify this for yourselves!]

Book I ends with these words in Psalm 41:13 ~ *Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen.*

Book II ends with these words in Psalm 72:18-19 ~ *Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only does wondrous things! And blessed be His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen.*

Book III ends with these words in Psalm 89:52 ~ *Blessed be the LORD forevermore! Amen and Amen.*

Book IV ends with these words in Psalm 106:48 ~ *Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, "Amen!" Praise the Lord!*

So Book I ends with praise, Book II ends with praise, Book III ends with praise and Book IV ends with praise. How does Book V end? Not with praise but with *fireworks of*

praise! Not with one or two verses of praise to God but with 5 psalms of praise to God, from Psalm 146–150. And Psalm 150 itself is a psalm where every line begins with the word ‘praise’ or contains the word ‘praise’!

This observed pattern – *from the chords of sufferings to the choruses of praises* – in the Book of Psalms must teach us at least these three things:

[1] They reflect the earthly life of our Lord Jesus!

When Christ first appeared on the scene, He came as a Man of sorrows! Indeed, the Son of Man must suffer many things. But sorrow was not the last word, for Christ must suffer and then enter into His glory. The end of Christ’s story was that *‘God has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.’* The life of Christ is hence reflected in the pattern and flow of the Psalms -- from laments to praise, from suffering to glory!

[2] They reflect the earthly pilgrimage of Christians!

Christ and His people cannot be separated. So at the first level, the Psalms point us to Christ, and we see Him from laments to glory. At another level, this pattern is also a message for us concerning our life in Christ! Like our Savior, we too move from laments to glory. Like the Psalms, our life here on earth has more than its fair share of laments, but it does not and must not stop there. It must and definitely will move to glory. Did not Christ’s apostle say, *“If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him?”* Our life in Christ must not only have sorrows, but it must also have praises! And praise be to God, it will most definitely end with a huge fireworks of praise when we see our Lord face-to-face in His glorious home!

[3] They should also reflect our Christian worship today!

We are made to be worshippers! We must worship! As we worship our God, our songs of worship are mixtures of praises and laments. In our Christian worship, we voice our praises and express our pains. But surely our forefathers were right in that our public worship should end with the doxology! Isn’t this how the Book of Psalms ends: with praise, fireworks of praise? Didn’t **Psalm 150** start each line with ‘praise God’, ‘praise Him’? And isn’t this what our traditional doxology say: *Praise God from whom all blessings flow, praise Him all creatures here below, praise Him above you heavenly hosts, praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost!*

As we take the next few weeks to study selected psalms from Book I of the Book of Psalms, remember to end each day’s Bible reading (study) with praises to our great God!!

Memory Passage: Psalm 1

Day 1 Read the Introduction to the Book of Psalms

1. (a) What key points have you learnt from the Introduction?

(b) How has what you've learnt change your life?

(c) Go and share what you've learnt with someone: _____
(Name)

Day 2 Read Psalm 1

For the next few days, we will be reading and studying Psalm 1 & 2. Placed right at the beginning of the Book of Psalms, Psalm 1 & Psalm 2 function as the introduction to the entire Book of Psalms. Psalm 1 begins with the word 'blessed' and Psalm 2 ends with the word 'blessed'. Psalm 1 commends the righteous who meditates on God's law while Psalm 2 condemns the sinners who plot against God's rule. Psalm 1 contrasts the life of the righteous and wicked --- the former shall prosper (v3) while the latter shall come to nothing (v6). Psalm 2 sharpens the contrasts --- the wicked rebels against God and His Anointed, only to perish in the way (v12) and all their plots coming to nothing; the righteous puts his trust in God, kisses His Anointed and is declared truly happy (v12)!

Psalm 1 & 2 set the stage and lay the framework for our study of Psalms. In this Book, we will find the wicked and the righteous placed side by side. In this Book, we will find the law of God and the rule of God emphasized. In this Book, we will meet God reigning and that through His Anointed. This Book will instruct us concerning the truly happy life, that such a life is found in conforming our life to God's Law, that such a life is found in subjecting ourselves to the Lord's Anointed, that living such a life will bring oppositions but the Lord's Anointed will triumph and we in Him!

We start with Psalm 1 today.

1. The psalm begins with the word "blessed". What does this word mean?

2. Book I of the Book of Psalms (Psalm 1-41) has 7 references to the blessed man. Look up the verses and copy them out below:

Psalm 1:1 ~

Psalm 2:12 ~

Psalm 32:1 ~

Psalm 32:2 ~

Psalm 34:8 ~

Psalm 40:4 ~

Psalm 41:1 ~

Based on the above 7 references, describe the blessed man in your own words:

Day 3 Read Psalm 1 again

1. (a) According to this psalm, what would the blessed man not do?

(b) According to this psalm, what would the blessed man do?

(c) Review your life in the past 7 days. Is it more like what is described in 1(a) or 1(b)?
2. (a) To what is the blessed man likened?

(b) To what are the ungodly likened?

(c) The two pictures above --- 2(a) and 2(b) --- are meant to form a sharp contrast so as to convey a message. What is the message?

Day 4 Read Psalm 1 yet again

1. According to this psalm, what is the end of the blessed man?
2. According to this psalm, what is the end of the ungodly?
3. The blessed man could also be called the godly man. Would you agree? Why?
(Hint: Your answer must come from Psalm 1)
4. What have you learnt from Psalm 1?

Go look for one person (name: _____) to share this lesson with.

Day 5 Summary & review of Psalm 1

Structural Outline of Psalm 1

This psalm has a chiastic structure (we call it the sandwich or hamburger):

¹Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.

³He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither;

And whatever he does shall prosper.

⁴ The ungodly are not so,

But are like the chaff which the wind drives away.

⁵Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. ⁶For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

In looking at the 'hamburger' structure, our attention is immediately drawn to the 'meat' (centre) portion:

And whatever he does shall prosper.

⁴ The ungodly are not so,

This is the central message of Psalm 1 – *In contrast to the ungodly, the godly are blessed;*

unlike the ungodly, the godly shall prosper in whatever they do!

This central message of Psalm 1 is meant to attract us, to persuade us, to reason with us, that we should leave the group of the ungodly and line ourselves up with the godly. ***Have you done it?***

Brief Notes on Psalm 1

The blessed man will not walk in the *counsel* of the ungodly, stand in the *path* of the wicked nor sit in the *seat* of the scornful. ‘*Counsel*’ points to *thinking*, meaning the godly man will not accept nor adopt the *thinking* of the ungodly. ‘*Path*’ points to *behaving*, meaning the godly will not follow or imitate the conduct of the wicked. ‘*Seat*’ points to *belonging*, meaning the godly will not join the “Scorners Society” and share in their attitudes.

Instead, the godly man will let the Word of God shape his thinking, guide his behaviour and mould his attitudes. Such a man will be doing what Joshua 1:8 commands ~ *This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.* The word ‘prosper’ found in both Psalm 1:3 and Joshua 1:8 means ‘*achieving anything worthwhile*’ (Derek Kidner).

Chaff is rootless, weightless and useless. This is what the ungodly are, to God and to man! No matter how glamorous they look, at the end of the day, they are of no value to God and no positive use to their fellow men. In contrast, the godly are likened to an evergreen tree – always a delight to God and always a channel of blessing to people around!

The last two verses contrast the future of the godly and the ungodly:

Godly

1. *Able to stand before God*
Able to find a place among God’s people
2. *‘Know’ can mean ‘care’ and ‘to own’.*
Hence the godly have God’s care and are owned by God!

Ungodly

- No leg to stand before the Judge*
No place among God’s people
- ‘Perish’ can mean a road that comes to nothing/ruin, or hopes and plans frustrated, or being lost.*
Ultimately, it means damnation.

What have you learnt from the Brief Notes above?

Go and share what you’ve learnt with someone: _____
(Name)

Day 6 Read Psalm 2

1. There is two groups mentioned here – Group A fighting against Group B. Who are the members of each group?

Group A

The _____ and the _____

The _____ and the _____

Group B

The LORD and His _____

2. (a) What's the goal of Group A in waging this war?

(b) Can you think of some real-life examples that illustrate this?

Day 7 Read Psalm 2 again

1. How did the Lord respond to the rebellion of Group A?

Verse 4 ~

Verse 5 ~

Verse 6 ~

2. (a) Verse 7 tells us the identity of the king that the Lord will set up. Who is he?

(b) Verse 8 tells us the extent of his kingdom. How broad and how far is it?

(c) Verse 9 tells us what he will do to the rebels (Group A). What is it?

Week 2

[6th May – 12th May 2012]

Memory Passage: Psalm 2

Day 1 Read Psalm 2 once more

1. Verses 10-12 contain some wise counsels to the rebels. What are they counseled to do?

2. The psalm ends with an exhortation, and encouragement to heed the wise counsels. What is it?

Blessed _____.

3. Read Acts 4:24-30. The apostles recognized God's Anointed/King/Son of Psalm 2 as Jesus. Therefore the wise counsels of verses 10-12 can be read as counsels to us on how we should respond to Jesus! Have you heeded the wise counsels here?

If 'Yes', go and tell it to someone (name: _____)

If 'No', why not? What's stopping you? Write it down:

Day 2 Summary & review of Psalm 2

Psalm 2 clearly has *four* key phases. Verses 1-3 is the *first* phase where the psalmist expressed his deep astonishment at the senseless rejection of the Lord's rule and Ruler – *Why rage . . . plot . . . set themselves . . . take counsel . . . against the Lord and His anointed?* The opposition is **fierce** (*rage*), **deliberate** (*plot -- same word as 'meditate' in Psalm 1:2, set themselves, take counsel*), and **mad** (*a vain thing*).

Their words (verse 3) reflect the words of Luke 19:14 ~ *But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We will not have this man to reign over us.'* At the end of the day, in our sinful hearts, that is our attitude towards God and His Son! **Is this still your attitude towards God and Jesus today?**

The *second* phase is found in verses 4-6. The attention is now shifted to God and His response to these foolish rebels. God laughs at them – *Can puny creatures stand up to, let alone defeat the Almighty Creator?* God rebukes them, telling them with a tone of defiance that He will enthrone His king, regardless of how hard they oppose and resist!

The words of Daniel 4:35 rings true: *All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing. He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?"*

Or the words of Psalm 115:3: *But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.*

In view of the above, what do you think is the wiser thing to do?

The *third* phase is found in verses 7-9. These are the words of the Lord's Anointed, the installed king. These are probably what He said at His enthronement – (a) He is legally and officially installed as king, (b) He has been promised a universal kingdom by God and (c) He will rule His people and judge His enemies.

****Verse 7 ~ “I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You.’”**

This is an elaboration of God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:12-14a ~ *When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son.*

Looking through the lens of the New Testament, we know that this is and will be fulfilled ultimately in Jesus Christ our Lord. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. At His return, all knees shall bow and all tongues confess that He is Lord! **Are your knees already bowed to Jesus today?**

The *fourth* phase is found in verses 10-12. Once again, it is the psalmist speaking and he is exhorting the rebels to lay down their arms and submit to God's king instead. God will triumph and those who reject Him will be judged. Hence kiss the Son, serve Him and rejoice in Him. In one word, trust Him! **Are you the blessed person described in Psalm 2:12d?**

Day 3 Background information of Psalm 3

Turn to Psalm 3 in your Bible and look at the title (the 1-2 lines before verse 1). What does it say? Copy it out in the space below:

This title gives us the background of Psalm 3. Absalom (David's third son) has rebelled against the king, his father. 2 Samuel 15 gives us the details of his rebellion:

- 15:1-6 ~ *Absalom acted craftily to win the affections of the people.*
- 15:7-12 ~ *The day arrived for Absalom to stage the rebellion. The revolt looked set to succeed with Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, joining Absalom and 'the people with Absalom continually increased in number.'*
- 15:13-37 ~ *David learned of the rebellion. He knew that Absalom didn't just want his crown but his head as well! Hence he fled Jerusalem with his loyal followers, crossed the Brook Kidron and went into the wilderness. It was (likely) in the wilderness that David wrote Psalm 3.*

Put yourself in the shoes of David.

What emotions will you have?

What words will you say?

What deeds will you do?

Tomorrow, we shall turn to Psalm 3 and look at David's emotions, words and deeds when he was confronted with this situation.

Day 4 Read Psalm 3

1. Psalm 3 is a *lament* psalm. What was David's lament/complaint?

Verse 1:

Verse 2:

2. Look at the words of the rebels in verse 2: *There is no help for him in God.*

What does this phrase mean (in your view)?

What was their purpose for saying such things?

3. How did David view God (verse 3)? What does each of the term mean?

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Day 5 Read Psalm 3 again

1. What did David do and what was God's response? (Verse 4)

2. With God sustaining him, what was David able to do? (Verse 5)

3. What else did God make possible for David? (Verse 6)

Day 6 Read Psalm 3 once more

1. (a) What did David pray for? (Verse 7a-b)

(b) What was the 'argument' he used in this prayer? (Verse 7c-d)

2. What did David attribute to the Lord? (Verse 8)

3. (a) Write down one lesson you've learnt from Psalm 3:

(b) How has your life changed as a result of it?

Day 7 Summary Notes on Psalm 3

Verse 1-2

It must be a heart-wrenching experience for David to face the rebellion of his son Absalom. In his hour of intense sorrow and deep grief, David turned to his God. Verses 1-2 contain his lament, and we note that his lament is to the Lord!

His enemies are many (v1b, v2a) and increasing (v1a)! They are actively hostile to him – *trouble me, rise up against me*. They may have said many things against David, but this one sentence sticks: *There is no help for him in God!* This is an attack on his faith. David may be able to handle physical attacks, but if he is persuaded that God cannot help him or that God has abandoned him, then it would be more than he could handle!

Verse 3-4

These two verses are set in sharp contrast to the earlier two verses. Here the attention is shifted to God. First of all, who God is: my shield (*to protect me*), my glory (*my real glory is God, not my crown; I find my rest and satisfaction in Him*) and the lifter of my head (*I look to Him to deliver me from this humiliation*). Next, what David will do: I will cry out to Him!

What is the point of knowing who God is and remaining silent? David reminded himself of who his God is, and then cried out to Him for deliverance! He was not disappointed, for he could say that God heard him!

Verse 5-6

When we are surrounded by dangers, when our hearts are full of sorrows, we fear and we have insomnia! Hence it is amazing to read of David being able to sleep soundly in such a situation, and not fearing. What's his secret? He knew that God was right there with him ~ *for the LORD sustained me*. God help us to learn and practice this truth!

V7-8

Still facing the very threat to his life, David asked God to arise and save him. He is confident that God will do that because God had delivered him, time and again in the past.

*His love in time past forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink;
While each Ebenezer I have in review
Confirms his good pleasure to help me quite through.*
William Cowper

David ends his *lament* psalm with a statement of praise to God. He attributes salvation and blessings to the LORD his God! What an inspiring testimony – that a child of God should turn to God in the hour of his deepest sorrow, and praise God even before he is out of his troubles!

How has the Summary Notes helped you in your understanding of Psalm 3? What additional things have you learnt?

Go and share what you have learnt with someone: _____
(Name of the person)

Week 3

[13th May – 19th May 2012]

Memory Passage: *Psalm 8:3-5 ~ When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor.*

Day 1 Read Psalm 8

1. Who is the author of this psalm?
2. What did the psalmist praise God for? (Verse 1)
3. How has God chosen to silence the enemy and the avenger? (Verse 2)

Day 2 Read Psalm 8 again

1. The psalmist was amazed at God's concern for man. What prompted his amazement? (Verses 3-4)
2. (a) How was man exalted when God created him? (Verses 5-6)

(b) What things were placed under man's feet? (Verses 7-8)

(c) Is man's dominion over the earth still true today?
3. How did David end his psalm?

Day 3 Summary Notes on Psalm 8

This psalm is an unsurpassed example of what a hymn of praise should be – celebrating God's glory and grace, rehearsing who God is and what He has done, relating ourselves and our world to Him. We are meant to sing and read with a spirit of mingled joy and awe!

In this psalm, David talks about the unexpected ways of God, in terms of the roles He assigned to the strong and weak (v2), the spectacular and obscure (v3-5), the many and few (v6-8), but he begins with God and ends with God – *How excellent is Your name in all the earth, O LORD our Lord!*

This is a hymn of praise to God. **Do you praise God? Is the praise of God a regular feature of your life?**

Hebrews 2:5-9 quotes Psalm 8 and applies it to Jesus Christ. In Psalm 8, we read of God putting all things under man's feet after God created him. Sadly, this dominion over the earth did not last because of man's rebellion against God. Jesus came into this world as Man. Through His life and death, Jesus is now crowned with glory. Jesus is the first fulfillment of Psalm 8. Through Jesus, all His people shall experience the truth of Psalm 8 one day!

How has the Summary Notes helped you in your understanding of Psalm 8? What have you learnt?

Go and share what you have learnt with someone: _____
(Name of the person)

Day 4 Read Psalm 14:1-3

1. Who denies the existence of God?
2. What sort of behavior and action does the denial of God result in?

Verse 1c:

Verse 1d:

Verse 1e:

Verse 3a:

Verse 3b:

Verse 3c:

3. Read Genesis 6:5-7. The people in these 3 verses have the same behavior as those described in Psalm 14:1-3. What is God's response?

Note: The New Testament in Romans 1:18-32 also talks of people who have denied God's existence and engaged in all sorts of evil deeds. This shows that *the fool* of Psalm 14 can be found also in our day and age! God's response was to give them up to their lusts. One expression of this punishment from God is the prevalence of the homosexual lifestyle!

Day 5 Read Psalm 14:4-7

Focusing on verses 4-6, there is a contrast set up between evil men and righteous men. Evil men are called workers of iniquity while righteous men are God's people who are described as 'poor'.

1. What did the workers of iniquity do to God's people?

Verse 4:

Verse 6:

2. What would God do for His people?

Verse 5:

Verse 6:

3. (a) What is David praying for in verse 7?

(b) How can we pray the prayer of verse 7 in our day and age?

Day 6 Review of Psalm 14

1. What have you learnt from Psalm 14?

2. Read the Summary Notes of Psalm 14:

God calls the man who denies His existence a fool! The word 'fool' is 'nabal' in Hebrew, a word that implies an aggressive perversity, epitomized in the Nabal of 1 Samuel 25:25. His problem is not intellectual but spiritual and moral. Hence, the effect is '*corrupt, abominable works, do no good, turned aside, become corrupt*'. In simple words, the logical consequence of atheism ("there is no God") is wickedness ("there is no good")!

Men deny God's existence because men hate Him. And men will express that hatred of God by oppressing God's people. Hence we read of workers of iniquity eating up the righteous like eating bread. Often, the righteous are helpless – they are poor, but not totally helpless – they can call upon God right there and then; God is their refuge even as they experience the heat!

Our only hope is in God. Hence, like David, we look for deliverance, not from men or human instruments, but from God! It is true that God will save out of Zion, meaning through His people. Like David, we must long for God's name to be vindicated, for the fortunes of Christ's church to be restored, for God's enemies to be punished, so that finally we can rejoice like the saints in Revelation 18:20 and 19:1-7!

How has the Summary Notes helped you in your understanding of Psalm 14? What have you learnt from reading the notes?

Go and share what you have learnt with someone: _____
(Name of the person)

Day 7 Topical Study: The Fool (I)

We were introduced to 'the fool' in Psalm 14:1. For the next four days, we will take a tour of Proverbs to take a closer look at 'the fool'. The purpose of this study tour is to see 'the fool' clearly and avoid being like him!

In Proverbs, 'the fool' is presented to us in various guises. First, there's the *simple* (**peti**). This kind of person is easily led, gullible and silly. He is naive, and because of his thoughtlessness, may degrade to more serious forms of folly.

Read the three verses below and write down the characteristic of the *simple* as presented:

Proverbs 14:15 ~

Proverbs 22:3 ~

Proverbs 1:22 ~

The best-known and most authoritative passage on the *simple* is Proverbs 7:6-27. Take time to read it, if you can. We know from verse 21-23 that he fell into the trap set by the seductress and his end was destruction. But how did he meet the seductress? Why did he meet the seductress? Read Proverbs 7:6-9 to get your answers:

Proverbs 21:11a holds out hope for the *simple*: *When the scoffer is punished, the simple is made wise.* However, he could also end up in this way: *The simple inherit folly* (Proverbs 14:18a)!

Take time to look at the picture of the *simple* presented above. Do you look like him?

Memory Passage: **Psalm 14:1** ~ *The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good.*

Day 1 Topical Study: The Fool (II)

In Proverbs, ‘the fool’ is presented to us in various guises. First, there’s the *simple* (**peti**). Second, there’s the *fool*. Actually, Proverbs used three different Hebrew words for ‘fool’ – **kesil** (dull and obstinate), **ewil** (someone obstinate and impatient of all advice) and **nabal** (mind closed to reason and truth). **Nabal** is the Hebrew word used in Psalm 14:1!

Let’s take some time to examine the *fool’s* characteristics using each of the three terms:

Kesil

Proverbs 15:14b ~
Proverbs 17:10 ~
Proverbs 26:11 ~

Ewil

Proverbs 10:14 ~
Proverbs 20:3 ~
Proverbs 1:7 ~
Proverbs 12:15 ~
Proverbs 27:22 ~

Nabal

All that were said of **kesil** and **ewil** can be said of **nabal**, plus the idea of boorishness. The classic example would be Abigail’s husband in **1 Samuel 25**. What was said of him would be true of **nabal**: *For he is such a scoundrel that one cannot speak to him.” (1 Samuel 25:17d).*

Take time to look at the 3 pictures of the *fool* presented above. Do you possess any of these characteristics?

Day 2 Topical Study: The Fool (III)

In Proverbs, ‘the fool’ is presented to us in various guises. First, there’s the *simple* (**peti**). Second, there’s the *fool* (**kesil, ewil or nabal**). Third, there’s the *scoffer* (**les**). He despises correction and sets his heart on mischief. He is a troublemaker and a bad influence on the impressionable. Yet, for all his arrogance, the Lord will scorn him ultimately (Proverbs 3:34).

Read the five verses below and write down the characteristic of the *scoffer* presented in each of them:

Proverbs 13:1 ~

Proverbs 15:12 ~

Proverbs 21:24 ~

Proverbs 22:10 ~

Proverbs 29:8 ~

The *scoffer* is the advanced level 'fool'! He is very far down the path of folly. Look at the picture of the *scoffer* presented above. Pray that we will not look like him! Pray that our children will not look like him!

Day 3 Topical Study: The Fool -- Review

Take time to review our topical study on 'the fool'.

Write down three things you have learnt and how they have changed your life:

(a)

(b)

(c)

Go and share what you have learnt with someone: _____
(Name of the person)

Before you move on from this topical study, read Proverbs 9:10 as a reminder!

Day 4 Read Psalm 15

1. The psalm begins with two questions. What are they?

▪

▪

In verse 1, the psalmist makes use of a *parallelism*, that is, the first line is saying the same thing as the second line, albeit in different words. So what actually is the question being posed here?

2. Verses 2-5 give a ten-part answer to the questions posed. What is it?

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-

What would you call a person who meets the above descriptions?

3. What is the promise given to such a man? (Verse 5c)

Day 5 Summary Notes on Psalm 15

Verse 1

Psalm 15 asked the most important question that can ever be asked: *Who is qualified to come into the presence of God?* In fact, the question goes further and deeper than that! It is not just ‘come into God’s presence’ but ‘able to remain there’ – *abide, dwell*. Hence, who can come into God’s presence to worship Him and to walk with Him?

Verses 2-5b

“*He who walks uprightly,*” begins verse 2. ‘Walk’ refers to the general pattern of one’s life. Hence, the answer is: *He whose life is upright!* In practical terms, how would such a life look like? Two ways: (i) *Works righteousness* – He will do what is good and right (ii) *Speaks truth sincerely* – He will speak the truth and mean it.

Verse 3 zeroes in on his speech – *does not backbite, does no evil to his neighbor nor takes up a reproach against his friend*. All slanders and gossip are out! The New Testament version is found in James 1:26 ~ *If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless.*

Verse 4a-b shifts the attention to his attitudes – *he values God-fearers but despises vile persons*. This attitude will of course be revealed through the types of company he keeps. Remember Psalm 1:1? The blessed, godly man is he who ‘*walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful*’.

Verse 4c-5b focuses on his dealings – *he is not involved in usury or bribery*. Usury is loaning money out for interest, and often involves exploiting and abusing the poor. Needless to say, engaging in bribery is to pervert justice for one’s selfish gain. Instead of being involved in usury or bribery, this man will swear to his own hurt and not change!

Verse 5c

The man described above is promised permanency in God’s presence – *He shall not be moved*. He will abide and continue to abide in God’s tabernacle; he will dwell and continue to dwell in God’s holy hill.

Is there anyone in this world, anyone in the Old Testament or New Testament period, who fits the description above? None except our Lord Jesus Christ! He and He alone met the conditions for being in God’s presence! And it is only through Jesus Christ that we can be accepted by God and draw near to Him in worship today!

Take some time to ponder the words of this hymn by Thomas Binney, and sing it to the praise of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in worship:

*Eternal light! Eternal light! How pure the soul must be
When, placed within Thy searching sight, it shrinks not but with calm delight
Can live and look on Thee.*

*The spirits that surround Thy throne, may bear the burning bliss;
But that is surely theirs alone, since they have never, never known
A fallen world like this.*

*Oh, how shall I, whose native sphere, is dark, whose mind is dim.
Before the ineffable appear, and on my natural spirit bear
The uncreated beam?*

*There is a way for man to rise, to that sublime abode:
An offering and a sacrifice, a Holy Spirit’s energies
An Advocate with God*

*These, these prepare us for the sight, of holiness above;
The sons of ignorance and night, may dwell in the eternal Light,
Through the eternal love.*

How has the Summary Notes helped you in your understanding of Psalm 15? What have you learnt from reading the notes?

Day 6 Read Psalm 19:1-6

1. What declares God's glory and shows His handiwork? (Verse 1)
2. What speaks and reveals knowledge about God's glory? (Verse 2)
3. Where is this knowledge of God's glory heard? (Verses 3-4)
4. By saying that there is nothing hidden from the heat of the sun, what was the psalmist seeking to convey? (Verse 6)

Day 7 Read Psalm 19:7-10

1. A synonym is a word or phrase that has the same or nearly the same meaning as another word or phrase in the same language. For example, *joyful*, *elated*, *glad* are synonyms. Verses 7-9 contain six synonyms for the Word of God. What are they?
 -
 -
 - The statutes of the Lord
 -
 -
 - The judgments of the Lord
2. Verses 7-9 also provide us with some attributes and benefits of the Word of God. What are they?

	<u>Attribute</u>	<u>Benefit</u>
(a)	Perfect	Convert the soul
(b)		
(c)	Right	Rejoicing the heart
(d)		
(e)		
(f)	True and righteous altogether	-----

3. (a) How did the psalmist describe the value of God's Word? (Verse 10)

(b) Do you share his viewpoint?

Week 5

[27th May – 2nd Jun 2012]

Memory Passage: **Psalm 19:14 ~ *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.***

Day 1 Read Psalm 19:11-14

1. According to the psalmist, how would the Word of God help him? (Verse 11)

2. What concerns did he have regarding 'secret faults'? (Verse 12)

3. What did he pray for concerning 'presumptuous sins'? (Verse 13)

4. (a) What was his closing prayer? (Verse 14)

(b) What does the closing prayer reveal about the psalmist's view of God?

Day 2 Summary Notes on Psalm 19

Psalm 19 celebrates the marvelous truth that our God speaks! Until and unless He speaks, we will never know anything about Him!! God speaks to us in two ways and this psalm is structured based on these two ways:

[i] God Speaks to us via *His Creation* (V1-6)

The glory and handiwork of God are made known through His creation, as one observes the heavens and firmament. It actually "speaks" day and night to the whole world, if people will only listen. The pervasive nature of this revelation is

likened to the sun passing through the heavens from one end to the other, like a joyful bridegroom or a strong runner. There is no place hidden from its heat. In Christian Theology, this is called *general revelation*. A New Testament passage that talks about *general revelation* is Romans 1:20-23. Take time to read these 4 verses.

[ii] God speaks to us via *His Word* (V7-11)

In Christian Theology, this is called *special revelation*. Here in Psalm 19, *special revelation* is God's Word given to God's people in the Old Testament. They are called *the law of God, the testimony of the Lord, the statutes of the Lord, the commandment of the Lord, the fear of the Lord, the judgments of the Lord*. They are *perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, endures forever, true and righteous*. They can *convert the soul, make the simple wise, rejoice the heart, enlighten the eyes, warn God's servant*. In summary, the Word of God is more precious than fine gold and sweeter than the honeycomb! Since God's Word is so marvelously wonderful, then I must be a fool to ignore it!!

The psalm ends with three prayers:

- (a) A prayer for purification (v12)
- (b) A prayer for prevention (v13)
- (c) A prayer for perfection (v14)

How has the Summary Notes helped you in your understanding of Psalm 19? What have you learnt?

Go and share what you have learnt with someone: _____
(Name of the person)

Day 3 Read Psalm 20

1. There are seven 'May' found in this psalm. Locate them and write them down below:

- *May the Lord*
-
-
-
-
-
- *May the King*

2. The seven 'May' clearly indicate that Psalm 20 is a prayer.

- (a) Who was praying?

(b) For whom?

3. (a) Verse 7 shows two contrasting actions. What are they?

(b) Verse 8 tells us their contrasting results. What are they?

(c) What is the purpose of presenting the two contrasting actions and their contrasting results?

Day 4 Summary Notes on Psalm 20

The 'day of trouble' is one of impending battle, which is indicated by the chariots of verse 7. The scene before us is the king of Israel (the Lord's anointed) preparing to march forth into battle against the enemy. He has already offered his prayers and sacrifices, prepared his plans and readied his soldiers.

From verse 1-5, we have the congregation's prayer of blessing for the king. Israel prays for the victory of their king, for in his victory is their victory! Verse 6-8, written in the singular voice, is likely to be the response of the king. He is persuaded that God will grant him victory (v6) and he is professing his trust in God and rallying his soldiers to join him in doing so (v7-8). Verse 9 could be the combined, final prayer of the king and his people – *Save, Lord! May the King answer us when we call*. Their trust is placed ultimately in the King (the LORD their God, their real King) and they ask Him for victory!

1. We may not be facing military battles today like Israel and her king in Psalm 20. How then can Psalm 20 be relevant to us?
2. Write down one thing you've learnt – either from your study of Psalm 20 or from the Summary Notes:

Go and share what you have learnt with someone: _____
(Name of the person)

Day 5 Read Psalm 23

1. The LORD is the main figure of Psalm 23. To whom is He likened?

2. How does the shepherd *provide* for his sheep?

Verse 2:

Verse 3:

3. How does the shepherd *protect* his sheep?

Verse 4:

Verse 5:

4. Despite the dangerous places and hostile enemies, the sheep will be preserved (kept safe).

(a) Where is the sheep's final destination?

(b) How can we be sure that the sheep will reach the final destination?

Day 6 Summary Notes on Psalm 23 (I)

Verse 1

The LORD is my shepherd --- this is the main idea of Psalm 23. Though Psalm 23 is the sheep talking, yet all the attention is fixed on the sheep's Hero, the shepherd --- how he provided for his sheep and protected them.

This is a typical day in the life of the shepherd and his sheep. In the morning, the shepherd will open the door of the sheepfold and lead his sheep out. He will bring them to various places for food, water and exercise. Together, they will have to deal with the heat from the sun, the dangers from wild animals, the thorns along the way, the drying up of a stream, and a host of other matters. Actually, it is the shepherd who has to deal with them. The sheep are really weak, helpless and even foolish! The shepherd is the hero who handled everything and every situation while the sheep are utterly dependant on him. Without him, they are dead! With him, they can say with great satisfaction and joy, "*We shall have no lack!*"

Verse 2-3a

Verse 2 mentioned “*green pastures and still waters*”. The picture is of an oasis while the message is rest and refreshment! The journey begins early in the morning when the shepherd leads the sheep out of the sheepfold, going to various places to look for grass to eat. It has been a busy and tiring morning. As the morning progresses, so the heat increases, and by noontime it is time to find a shady place to rest.

This is why the next statement reads: *You restore my soul*. ‘Soul’ can be translated as ‘life’. You restore my life --- revitalize it! The shepherd brings his sheep to lie down in green pastures for rest. Also, after a morning of eating, the sheep needs water. The still waters meet that need. Moreover, having been under the hot sun for 4-5 hours, if they don’t drink, they are going to be dehydrated sheep soon!

Hence, how timely and needed is this noontime oasis. How kind, how good, how wise is the shepherd to provide the sheep with what they need, at the very hour they need them! He certainly knows how to restore their life!!

What have you learnt from Psalm 23?

What have you learnt from the Summary Notes (I)?

Go and share what you have learnt with someone: _____
(Name of the person)

Day 7 Summary Notes on Psalm 23 (II)

Verse 3b-5

- “*Paths of righteousness*” is actually “*right paths*” if you translate it literally. He leads me in right paths! After the noontime oasis, it is time to move again. But where should they go, and how to go? Once again, the attention is shifted to the hero, the shepherd. Sheep left on their own will run all over the place. Sheep left on their own will never walk in a straight line. The sheep need a shepherd, and here’s one! He leads them to walk in right paths. Not crooked ones, not dangerous ones, not slippery ones, but straight ones, safe ones, firm ones. In a word, right paths!
- “*Valley of the shadow of death*” -- the original phrase literally means “*a valley of deep darkness*.” Apparently, shepherds often have to lead their sheep through this valley in order to get to the pastures on the other side. But this valley is very dark, and poses great dangers for the sheep. There are two kinds of dangers in this valley: (i) wild dogs and other predators lurking in the shadow of the valley and (ii) gullies, most about 7-8 feet deep where the sheep could fall into.

In dealing with these predators, the shepherd's rod will come in very handy. And if any sheep slips and falls into the gully, then the shepherd's staff comes in useful. Hence, the rod and staff of the shepherd is a great comfort to the sheep!

- *"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over."*

Three scenarios are painted here:

- (A) Enemies – whatever they are, the shepherd ensures that the sheep will always be safe and have food to eat
- (B) Injuries -- The sheep could be bruised by a rock or scratched by the thorns. The shepherd will anoint the scratches and the bruises with olive oil, so that the wounds will get better, not worse.
- (C) Heat -- After a day's journey, the sheep needs water. There might be some that could be suffering from heat exhaustion. The shepherd will ensure that water be available to cool the sheep down.

Small things, simple things, but the shepherd will not ignore nor neglect them. We see the tender loving care bestowed on the sheep by the shepherd!

Verse 6

The sun has set. The moon is now shining. All the sheep (not one missing) are now safely in the sheepfold, with their stomachs filled, with wounds medicated and all needs met. What a picture of serenity and safety! How appropriate, as a sheep looks back to the day's journey, for it to say, *"Goodness and mercy has indeed followed me all throughout this day, and now I am safely back in my master's sheepfold."*

Applied to the believers' relationship with the LORD, this is a statement of our final preservation – *We shall finally dwell in God's house and that forever!* What will guarantee this? God's goodness and mercy following us all the days of our life!! What a picture of security and contentment! All because we have a shepherd and His Name is the LORD!

What have you learnt from Summary Notes (II)?

In John 10:11, Jesus said that He is the good shepherd who gives His life for His sheep. Psalm 23 is ultimately a psalm about Jesus our good shepherd. Take time to worship your shepherd. Use this hymn by Dorothy Trupp, if you wish:

*Savior, like a shepherd lead us, much we need Thy tender care;
In Thy pleasant pastures feed us, for our use Thy folds prepare.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Thou hast bought us, Thine we are.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Thou hast bought us, Thine we are.*

*We are Thine, Thou dost befriend us, be the guardian of our way;
Keep thy flock, from sin defend us, seek us when we go astray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Hear, O hear us when we pray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Hear, O hear us when we pray.*

*Thou has promised to receive us, poor and sinful though we be;
Thou hast mercy to relieve us, grace to cleanse and power to free.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! We will early turn to Thee.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! We will early turn to Thee.*

*Early let us seek Thy favor, early let us do Thy will;
Blessed Lord and only Savior, with Thy love our bosoms fill.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Thou hast loved us, love us still.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Thou hast loved us, love us still.*

**** We will take a break from Psalms and devote the next two weeks to Philemon,
in preparation for Church Camp 2012 ****

PHILEMON

Introduction

Around AD 60, the apostle Paul wrote this letter to Philemon while he was in prison in Rome (verse 1, 9, 10). The letter was sent to Philemon together with the letter to the Colossians. Onesimus was a slave of Philemon who had run away from him and somehow met Paul in Rome. Through Paul's teaching, he became a Christian.

The purpose of the letter was to ask Philemon to receive Onesimus back as a Christian brother and not just a slave. In this letter, Paul did not restrain himself in appealing to Philemon for the favour of receiving Onesimus back.

This letter also shows the apostle using all his personal influence to bring about a Christian answer to a very serious problem. Paul's letter was passionate but carefully composed to achieve the desired purpose. In this letter, we are brought closer to Paul's personal ministry and to feel his profound desire to model redemption in a personal problem between two believers.

Note:

At the end of each day's lesson, we encourage you to take a while to reflect, pray and write down one lesson that you can share with your RTBT group members on the Lord's Day.

Week 6

[3rd Jun – 9th Jun 2012]

Memory Verse: Philemon 1:6 ~ *that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.*

Day 1: Overview – Read introduction

1. Who was the apostle Paul writing the letter to?
2. Where was Paul at the time when he wrote the letter? Which verses give us the answer?
3. What was the purpose of his letter?
4. Do you think it was 'coincidental' for Paul to meet and minister to Onesimus? What can we learn about God in this 'coincidence'?

Reflect, pray and write down one lesson that impressed you in the study today that you can share with your group members on the Lord's Day.

Day 2: Read verses 1-2

Summary of previous lesson

In the previous lesson, we gain an overview of the intended audience and purpose of Paul's letter. We also learnt that nothing could happen in our lives by coincidence. Everything is part of God's amazing providence. This is an important biblical worldview we should adopt as children of God.

1. What does Paul mean when he described himself as a 'prisoner **of Christ Jesus**' in verse 1? Why did he not simply say "Paul, a prisoner in Rome"?
2. What does verse 1 tell you about Paul's perspectives of his circumstances i.e. his imprisonment?
3. Verses 1c-2 state the intended recipients of the letter.
 - a. Who were they?
 - b. How did Paul address Philemon and Archippus?

4. What are some practical ways that we can adopt to become ‘fellow workers and soldiers’ with the ministers of the gospel today?

Reflect, pray and write down one lesson that impressed you in the study today that you can share with your group members on the Lord’s Day.

Day 3: Read verses 3-5

Summary of Last Lesson

In the previous lesson, we learnt that Paul, rather than mourning or murmuring over his unpleasant circumstance as a prisoner in Rome, viewed his imprisonment as part of God’s will for him to carry out His gospel work. We also learnt that all of us can be ‘fellow workers and soldiers’ with the ministers of the gospel, like Philemon and Archippus, when we participate in small ways for the work of the gospel.

1. How did Paul greet them in verse 3? Does it have any relevance to us in the way we relate to people around us?
2. What were the reasons for Paul’s thanksgiving in verse 4?
3. In verse 4, Paul said to Philemon, “making mention of **you always** in my prayers”. What can we imitate from Paul’s prayer life? (Focus on the two words that are in bold and underlined)

Reflect, pray and write down one lesson that impressed you in the study today that you can share with your group members on the Lord’s Day.

Day 4: Read verses 5-7

Summary of Last Lesson

In the last lesson, we learnt of the reasons for Paul’s thanksgiving to God for Philemon, namely his acts of faith and love towards Christ and His saints. We also learnt that Paul was a man of prayer who prayed frequently and personally for individuals, something which we should imitate in our prayer life.

1. What do you think is the connection between love and faith as mentioned in verse 5 – “love and faith... toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints”? Can a Christian have one without the other? Why?
2. What was Paul’s specific prayer for Philemon in verse 6?
3. Does ‘sharing of your faith’ (in v6) mean preaching the gospel? How did Philemon share his faith (hinted in v7) and what was the result of his ‘sharing’?
4. What would be the effects of sharing our faith the way Philemon did? (See Philemon 1:7, Matt 5:16)

Reflect, pray and write down one lesson that impressed you in the study today that you can share with your group members on the Lord’s Day.

Day 5: Read verses 8-9

Summary of Last Lesson

In the last lesson, we learnt that our faith in Christ must be demonstrated by our love for the saints. Philemon was one such example. He demonstrated his faith through his good works among the saints that brought much refreshment to their hearts and glorified God.

1. Does Paul have the authority to command Philemon to do “what is fitting”? If yes, where did his authority come from (v8)?
2. Why did he not use that authority? What approach did he take instead (v9a)?
3. On what basis did Paul appeal to Philemon in v9b?

4. What can we learn about Paul's preferred style of leadership?

Reflect, pray and write down one lesson that impressed you in the study today that you can share with your group members on the Lord's Day.

Day 6: Read verses 10-11

Summary of Last Lesson

In the last lesson, we learnt that although Paul had every authority as an apostle to command Philemon to do what was right, he chose, 'for love's sake', to gently appeal to him instead. This teaches us that often the best way to get people to do what we want is by gentle persuasion or through personal influence, instead of coercion. This leadership approach can be applied to our roles as parents, older siblings, student leaders, managers, etc. However, this does not mean that it is wrong to command with authority in a situation which requires us to act based on the legal authority that is vested upon us.

1. Why did Paul address Onesimus as "my son" in v10?
2. When and where was this "son" born to Paul? What can we learn about the way God carries out His gospel work?
3. From v11, why was Onesimus "**unprofitable**" to Philemon in the past and why was he now "**profitable**" to Philemon and Paul after his conversion?
4. Can a true believer of Christ be "unprofitable" to God and men? (See Matt 25:30, Tit 3:8) If not, why?
5. How can we, as Christian students, homemakers, employees and employers, be "profitable" to God and men in practical ways?

Reflect, pray and write down one lesson that impressed you in the study today that you can share with your group members on the Lord's Day.

Day 7: Read verses 12-14

Summary of Last Lesson

In the last lesson, we saw that Onesimus was 'born' to Paul during his ministry in prison. This shows us that God's work is not restricted by our circumstances. This should encourage us to persevere in our service for Him despite the difficulties we may be facing. We also learnt that a true Christian cannot be unprofitable both to God and men because engaging in good works is the natural outcome of being born-again.

1. What was Paul's instruction and request to Philemon in v12?
2. Paul described Onesimus as "my own heart" in v12b. What does that tell you about Paul's regard for Onesimus despite Onesimus' past and background?
3. Why did Paul say in v13 that if Onesimus had stayed with Paul, he would be serving Paul on Philemon's behalf? What does that tell you about Paul's personal confidence in Philemon?
4. What was Paul's reason for sending Onesimus back even though he wanted so much to keep him? (See v14)
5. What can we learn from Paul in terms of the way he tried to get Philemon to do what he wanted?

Reflect, pray and write down one lesson that impressed you in the study today that you can share with your group members on the Lord's Day.

Week 7

[10th Jun - 16th June 2012]

Memory Verse: Philemon 1:18 ~ *But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account.*

Day 1: Read verses 15-16

Summary of Last Lesson

In the last lesson, we learnt that Paul would like Philemon to receive Onesimus back. He called Onesimus “my own heart”, indicating to us how dear Onesimus was to him. Paul wanted Philemon to agree to his request voluntarily and not by compulsion. In the same manner, our obedience to Christ should also be that of love and not of duty alone.

1. In verses 15 and 16, how did Paul interpret the incident of Onesimus’ runaway from his master?
2. What should we bear in mind concerning God’s dealings with us, when we are faced with unpleasant circumstances? (Rom 8:28)
3. In v16, according to Paul, how should Philemon now regard Onesimus after his conversion? Was Paul suggesting that Onesimus functional status as a slave to Philemon is no longer valid after his conversion?
4. Paul said in v16 that Onesimus was “a beloved brother, especially to me but **how much more to you...**”. Why should Onesimus be more special to Philemon after his conversion? (Recall the parable of the prodigal son and why the father celebrated the return of the lost son)

Reflect, pray and write down one lesson that impressed you in the study today that you can share with your group members on the Lord’s Day.

Day 2: Read verses 17

Summary of Last Lesson

In the last lesson, we saw that Paul recognized a divine purpose in Onesimus’ departure from Philemon, in that it could “work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose”. We also learnt that Paul was not asking Philemon to free Onesimus from being a slave, but to receive him as a brother in Christ because he was like a prodigal son who was lost but was now found.

1. What final appeal did Paul make to Philemon to persuade him to receive Onesimus in v17-18?
2. Although Paul was an apostle, he desired Philemon to consider him “as a partner”. What lesson can we learn from Paul with regard to his attitude as an apostle and church leader?
3. Do we have people who are under our command/authority, or working under us? Do we regard them “as a partner” working for some common causes? How would such a perspective change the way we relate and work with them?

Reflect, pray and write down one lesson that impressed you in the study today that you can share with your group members on the Lord's Day.

Day 3: Read verses 18-19

Summary of Last Lesson

In the last lesson, Paul appealed to Philemon “as a partner”. This once again shows us that Paul would rather use his personal influence to persuade Philemon than to use his apostolic authority to command him to do what he wanted. It also suggests to us that Paul was always willing and humble to work with people, and he regarded them as partners in the Lord's ministry.

1. Does verse 18 remind us of Someone who has taken our debt into His own account? Why do you think Paul was willing to “stick out his neck” for Onesimus who was a slave by status?
2. Which part of the verse in v19 tells us that Paul was really serious about putting Onesimus' wrong into his account?
3. Although Onesimus was a slave by status, Paul did not hold back in appealing or ‘sticking out his neck’ on his behalf. What does that tell you about the apostle Paul and how can we imitate him in this regard?

Reflect, pray and write down one lesson that impressed you in the study today that you can share with your group members on the Lord's Day.

Day 4: Read verses 20-21

Summary of Last Lesson

In the last lesson, we saw how Paul imitated our Lord through his willingness to repay Philemon for the wrong done by Onesimus. In so doing, Paul was simply imitating Christ who took our sins and paid the penalty with His precious blood. We also learnt that Paul was not ashamed to appeal for Onesimus who was a slave by status. This shows us that Paul was not one who would be governed by a man's social status.

1. If Philemon were to voluntarily forgive Onesimus for his wrongdoing, how would Paul have felt? (See v20)
2. Paul mentioned the phrase "in the Lord" twice in v20? What does he mean and what does that tell us about the source of Paul's joy?
3. What was Paul confident about in v21?
4. In 2 Thessalonians 3:4, we also read of a similar confidence expressed by Paul about the Thessalonians churches. What do you think was the reason for Paul's optimism and confidence?
5. Do we express the same optimism and confidence towards those whom we disciple, raise or guide? If not, why?

Reflect, pray and write down one lesson that impressed you in the study today that you can share with your group members on the Lord's Day.

Day 5: Read verses 22-24

Summary of Last Lesson

In the last lesson, we learnt that if Philemon would do as Paul requested, Paul would regard the outcome as from the Lord, from Whom he derived his joy. We also learnt that Paul was never shy about expressing his confidence in those he knew and loved in the Lord, because his confidence was actually in the Lord who works in His people “both to will and to do His good pleasure”.

1. Verse 22 tells us that Paul was confident that he would be released from prison to visit Philemon. Where did his confidence lie (v22)?

2. Do you hold back in asking fellow believers to pray for you with regards to some particular matters? If so, why?

3. Paul mentioned Epaphras in v23. What else do we know about him from Col 4:12?

4. In verse 24, Paul mentioned a few other 'fellow labourers' who were in prison with him. Discuss the following:
 - a) Who was Marcus? What was his full name? See Acts 12:25, 15:37, Col 4:10, 1 Tim 4:11? Do you remember which book of the Bible he wrote?

 - b) Who was Aristarchus (See Acts 19:29)?

 - c) Who was Lucas? (See Col 4:14) Do you remember which books of the Bible he wrote?

 - d) Who was Demas? (See Col 4:14) What did Demas do to Paul later in 2 Tim 4:10? Why?

Reflect, pray and write down one lesson that impressed you in the study today that you can share with your group members on the Lord's Day.

Day 6: Read verse 25

Summary of Last Lesson

In the last lesson we learnt that Paul was confident of his release from prison because he believed that God would answer their prayers for him. This showed the apostle's great regard for the prayers of others for him.

1. What were Paul's final salutations to his audience?
2. We have noted earlier in v2 that the letter was written not just to Philemon but also to "the church" gathered in his house. That would imply that if Philemon was to receive Onesimus back, the church must also receive him into their midst. Applying this to our own context, if we have an offending brother who has done wrong to the church and repented of his/her sins, what practical ways can the church do to express our willingness to accept him/her? What attitude must we have in receiving someone like Onesimus who did wrong in the past?
3. On the other hand, supposing you were Onesimus, what attitude should you possess as you seek to return to the community of believers?

Reflect, pray and write down one lesson that impressed you in the study today that you can share with your group members on the Lord's Day.

Day 7: Summary Notes

The letter to Philemon was not simply a letter to an individual. It was also a letter to the church that gathered at Philemon's house (v2). Hence, when Paul requested that Philemon receive Onesimus, it was not only Philemon who was to receive him but the church as well. Hence, the process of restoring a repentant brother does not simply rest on the shoulders of the elders alone, but also on those of the church. Just like the father of the prodigal son who was ready to celebrate the return of his son, so the church must celebrate the return of a repentant brother and do all she can to make him feel at home again in the community of believers. The church must be ready and willing to receive him just as the Lord is always ready to forgive and receive us when we repent.

On the other hand, like the prodigal son, the repentant brother must return with humility, expecting nothing but trusting that the Lord has forgiven his sins, and receiving the love and forgiveness of the church with an open heart.

1. If Onesimus were your own son, how would you have received him back home knowing that he has repented of his sins?

2. Do you think sometimes we have reservations about a brother who has repented and is seeking to return to church? Why? What can you do to overcome those reservations?

3. Where do you see Christ in Paul's letter to Philemon?

**** We will resume our reading of selected Psalms for the next two weeks ****

Week 8

[17th Jun – 23rd Jun 2012]

Memory Passage: *Psalm 32:1-2 ~ Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

Day 1 Read Psalm 32:1-2

1. According to verse 1, the blessed man is:

(a)

(b)

Are (a) and (b) referring to the same thing?

2. According to verse 2, the blessed man is:

(c)

(d)

Are (c) and (d) referring to the same thing?

3. Are you the blessed person described in verses 1-2?

How can one become such a blessed person?

Day 2 Read Psalm 32:3-5

1. What consequences did David face for keeping silent (about his sin)?

Verse 3:

Verse 4a:

Verse 4b:

2. What did he then decide to do? What was the result? (Verse 5)

3. Which phrase best describes your state right now:

Keeping silent about your sin

OR

Acknowledging your sin to God

?

4. Re-read verse 5. How is it an encouragement to you to confess your sins to God?

Day 3 Read Psalm 32:6-7, Isaiah 55:6-7

1. '*For this cause*' (NKJV) can be translated as '*Therefore*' (ESV, NASB, ESV). In other words, verse 6 is the result of verse 5. As a result of David confessing to God and God forgiving him, what will people be doing?
2. Psalm 32:6 talks about '*in a time when You may be found*' while Isaiah 55:6 talks about '*while He may be found*'. Is there a time/situation where God may NOT be found?
3. (a) According to verse 7a, what did David liken God to?
(b) What will God do for David? (V7b-7c) What do they mean?

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Day 4 Read Psalm 32:8-11

1. What did God offer to do for David and the readers? (Verse 8)
2. What warning was given to David and the readers? (Verse 9)
3. (a) What will happen to the wicked? (Verse 10a)

(b) What will happen to those who trust YAHWEH? (Verse 10b)

(c) Looking at (a) and (b), what should the righteous and upright in heart do?

Day 5 Review and Summary Notes of Psalm 32

Write down the most important lesson you've learnt from your own reading & study of Psalm 32 above:

Summary Notes

David was the human author of Psalm 32. The title says it, and it is further confirmed by Romans 4:6-8. The psalm begins by stating the blessedness of having sins forgiven (verses 1-2). To have our sins forgiven is to have our sins covered (in New Testament language, we will say our sins covered by the blood of Jesus). Looking at this important matter from another angle, to have our sins forgiven means God not counting our sins against us! Again, from the New Testament, we know that God can be righteous and yet not count our sins against us, because our sins have been put to Christ's account. This is the Christian doctrine of **Justification by faith alone**. And the man who is justified is the man who goes on to pursue holiness (we call it **Sanctification** in Christian theology). Therefore the man *to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity* shall be the man *in whose spirit there is no deceit*.

Verses 3-5 describe the folly of covering up our sins! It is natural for a sinful man to cover up his sins, but it will only make things worse for him as depicted so graphically

in verses 3-4. Things turn for the better when he acknowledged his sins and confessed them to God. Almost unbelievably, God forgave him of his sins!!

God forgiving the sins of repentant David is a huge encouragement to the rest of God's people. Hence, they too will seek God's forgiveness! With our sins dealt with, and being in a right relationship with God, we enjoy God as our hiding place – He does not only keep us from trouble, He also makes us more than conquerors (surrounding us with songs of deliverance)!

We don't only need forgiveness; we also need instructions and guidance, lest we go down the wrong path again. Hence, God offers to teach and guide us, and He expects us to be teachable! This is the gist of verses 8-9 and it underlines for us that when we sin against God, it always comes down to this: *We are un-teachable because we refuse to submit to what God says, but instead choose to go our own ways!*

David ends the psalm with a sharp contrast: *The wicked shall have many sorrows while the one who trusts in the LORD shall have many mercies from Him.* Seeing this sharp contrast, the (implied) lesson is to be wise and trust in the LORD! *Why then be wicked?*

The explicit lesson is to rejoice – verse 11. Not only to rejoice in the blessedness of the righteous, but also to be glad in the LORD! Take delight and rejoice in who God is – He who forgives (vv1-2), He who faithfully pursues us (vv3-5), He who delights to hear our prayers and protects us (vv6-7), He who loves to instruct and guide us (vv8-9), and He who is righteous and merciful (vv10-11).

How has the Summary Notes helped you in your understanding of Psalm 32? What have you learnt?

Go and share what you have learnt with someone: _____
(Name of the person)

Day 6 Read Psalm 37:1-11

“There is no finer exposition of the third Beatitude (Matthew 5:5) than this psalm, from which it is drawn (verse 11). It is a wisdom psalm; it speak to man, not God, and its tone and style have some affinities with Proverbs, whose message of the righteous man's security is the central topic here.

The framework is an acrostic, with a fresh letter of the Hebrew alphabet to introduce each double verse (1-2, 3-4, etc; but our numbering falls out of step). As in some other acrostic psalms, notably 25 and 119, this external pattern leaves the poet free to muse on a few themes, returning to them at will, without losing all sense of form and progress.”

Derek Kidner

1. Three times in these 11 verses, believers are told not to fret when they see the prosperity of the wicked. Locate them and copy them out below:

Verse ____:

Verse ____:

Verse ____:

What is the meaning of 'fret'? Are you guilty of it right now?

2. According to verse 2 and verse 10, why shouldn't we fret?

3. According to verses 3-8, what should we do instead?

4. Who shall inherit the earth?

Verse 9b:

Verse 11:

5. What have you learnt from Psalm 37:1-11 and how has it change your life?

Day 7 Read Psalm 37:12-26

"Up to this point the battlefield has been the mind of the believer, goaded to exasperation at the brazenness of the wicked. Now the two types of men are looked at from the outside, and their fortunes and ways compared. Nearly every verse, to the end of the psalm, names the wicked or the righteous, or has some similar set of terms."

Derek Kidner

1. What will happen to the evil ploys hatched by the wicked against the just? (Verse 12-15)
2. What is better than the riches of many wicked? Why? (Verses 16-17)

3. What is said concerning the upright? (Verses 18-19)

4. What will happen to the wicked? (Verse 20)

Week 9

[24th Jun – 30th Jun 2012]

Memory Passage: ***Psalm 37:4-5 ~ Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord. Trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.***

Day 1 Re-read Psalm 37:12-26

1. What differences can be seen in the way the wicked and the righteous handle money? (Verse 21)

2. What is said about the good man in verses 23-24?

3. What observations has the psalmist made in his lifetime? (Verses 25-26)

4. What have you learnt from Psalm 37:12-26 and how has it change your life?

Day 2 Read Psalm 37:27-40

1. Scan through verses 28-38 and write down all that is said in these 11 verses concerning the righteous and the wicked:

The righteous

The wicked

2. Why did the psalmist provide us with such a detailed and contrasting picture of the righteous and the wicked?

Verse 27:

Verse 34:

Day 3 Re-read Psalm 37:27-40

1. What is said about the righteous in verses 39-40?
2. Why will the LORD save the righteous?

“The psalms ends with calm objectivity, the answer to the fretful impatience encountered at the start. Note the from Him (39) and the in Him (40): His initiative in sending, and our response in taking shelter; the help He gives and the refuge that He is.”

Derek Kidner

Day 4 Review Psalm 37:27-40

1. What have you learnt from these 14 verses?
2. How has it change your life?
3. Go and share what you have learnt with someone: _____
(Name of the person)

Day 5 Read Introductory Notes on Psalm 41 and Psalm 41:1-3

Introductory Notes on Psalm 41

The book of Proverbs tells us a common phenomenon that we already know: *Due to our selfishness, people normally want to avoid the poor.* (Proverbs 14:20a ~ *The poor man is hated even by his neighbor*; Proverbs 19:4b ~ *the poor is separated from his friends*)

As God’s people in the Old Testament, Israel must behave differently. Hence in Deuteronomy 15:7-11, the Israelites were called to tenderly regard and, as far as they can, assist the poor and afflicted. In Psalm 72 (a psalm that portrays the royal king of Israel) the king is also described as one who considers the poor (72:12-14). Hence, we

can say that Israel is meant to be a nation who considers the poor in their midst!

Not only did God call His people to look after the poor, He also gives them great encouragement to do it:

*He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord,
And He will pay back what he has given.
Proverbs 19:7*

*Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor
Will also cry himself and not be heard.
Proverbs 21:13*

1. Who is the blessed man? (Verse 1a)
2. How will he be blessed? (Verse 1b-3)

Day 6 Read Summary Notes on Psalm 41:1-3 and Psalm 41:4-10

Summary Notes on verses 1-3

The blessed man is the man who considers the poor. He is the man who lives out Deuteronomy 15:7-11. We note from the title of Psalm 41 that David is the author. Hence, this blessed man is the king who fulfills Psalm 72:12-14 as well!

Verse 1b-3 explains why this man is blessed – *God will deliver him and preserve him, God will not hand him over to his enemies, God will look after him when he is sick, nurse him and heal him!*

How has the Notes above helped you in your understanding of Psalm 41:1-3? What have you learnt?

Go and share what you have learnt with someone: _____
(Name of the person)

Psalm 41:4-10

Why did the psalmist ask the Lord to have mercy on him (v4, 10) and to raise him up (v10)?

Verse 4:

Verse 5-8:

Verse 9:

Day 7 Read Psalm 41:11-13

1. How will the psalmist know that God is pleased with him? (V11)
2. What did God do for the psalmist? (V12)
3. How did the psalmist end his psalm?

Summary Notes on verses 4-10

Attention is now focused on the psalmist's own situation: *He has sinned, he was sick, his enemies were hounding him and even his close friend has turned against him.* It was most definitely a very miserable condition and painful state for him!

In his hour of great need and intense pain, he turned to the LORD his God. Who else can he turn to? He asked for mercy and for healing. Would God hear him?

[Verse 10 ~ *But You, O Lord, be merciful to me, and raise me up, that I may repay them.* This may trouble some of us until we recall that David is the author and he is the king of Israel. In other words, this repayment is not private vendetta, but public justice meted out by rightful authority, namely the king.]

Summary Notes on verses 11-13

If we seek to relate v1-3 with v4-10, we may get the impression that though the man who considers the poor is blessed, yet here is David who had considered the poor but God appeared not to have blessed him! Verses 11-12 will address this apparent anomaly.

David said in verse 11 that when God answers his cry for mercy and healing, and not allowing his enemy to triumph over him, then he will know that God is pleased with him, meaning he will then know the picture painted in v1b-3 is true! He further expressed confidence that God will uphold him in his integrity (he did indeed seek to

live a blameless life, to align his life with God's word, in particular – considering the poor), and set him to live before His face.

The psalm ends with *hallelujah*, which is most apt! Whatever we may experience, at the end of the day, we shall praise Him.

Read the Summary Notes above. How have they helped you in your understanding of Psalm 41:4-13? What have you learnt?

Go and share what you have learnt with someone: _____
(Name of the person)

Acknowledgement

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They have very kindly given their time and energy to review the entire guide, asking questions all the way and giving many valuable suggestions. Thank you, fellow Shalomites!

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another! (Proverbs 27:17, ESV)