

A *Discover Together*
BIBLE STUDY

by Sue Edwards

Psalms

Discovering Authentic Worship



LEADER'S GUIDE

 **Kregel**
Publications

Psalms: Discovering Authentic Worship
Leader's Guide
©2013 Sue Edwards

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Before You Begin . . .

You'll want to acquaint yourself and your students with the resources available to enhance your study experience:

- *Videos.* Supplemental teaching videos of various lengths are available for individual or group use at www.discovertogetherseries.com. For quick access with your smart phone or other handheld device, QR codes within each lesson correspond to these videos. These videos contain personal testimonies, related stories, and historical background. The introductory video can be used in your initial gathering to excite and inform your students as they embark on this adventure together.
- *Digging Deeper.* Some women will want to work the optional Digging Deeper questions located in the margins of the study guide. Determine with your group how you want to use these study prompts. You may want to include them in your discussion, use them at the end if time allows, or simply suggest that women who want to spend more time in deeper study work on these on their own. If a particular woman shows an aptitude for Scripture study, you may want to ask her to tackle a particular Digging Deeper question and report her findings in the next session. Then ask if any other women also worked on that particular Digging Deeper, widening the discussion if possible.
- *Quotes, Background Info, and Extras.* Soak up the inspiring sidebars that relate to particular parts of each lesson. If any especially resonates with you, use it as a springboard for discussion or personal application.

In addition, there is a “Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders” available at www.discovertogetherseries.com.

GOAL OF THE STUDY

The goal of this study is to enrich women's worship by taking them deep into selected psalms.

Lesson 1 introduces the participants to a typical psalm of praise, setting the stage for a lifetime of deeper worship experiences. Lessons 2 through 7 focus on a psalm that highlights a specific hindrance to healthy worship. This study does not promote any particular worship tradition or practice. Instead, I am asking you, dear leader, to partner



with God to enrich the participants' worship forms, whatever they may be, individually and within their church family.

ENJOY THE DIFFERENCES

Worship styles and customs have differed throughout cultures and centuries. You may enjoy a particular kind of music, closing your eyes, or lifting your hands when you worship. But some women in your group may draw closer to God through other kinds of music and physical expressions. Your role as a leader is not to promote what works for you but instead to encourage meaningful discussion, as each woman discovers ways that enhance her own intimacy with God. Your task is to create a respectful and safe place where women can bare their souls to one another and to God.

One benefit of creating this kind of respectful ethos is that women with varied preferences from different churches and backgrounds can study together and learn from one another. Some might even complete the study challenged to incorporate worship methods that they would never have considered before—methods that will sweeten their worship experiences for the rest of their lives.

A SAFE SPACE

Creating this open protected place will be especially important after lesson 1, as you tackle the hindrances to authentic worship in lessons 2 through 7. We all wrestle with questions, doubts, and fears that can stymie our spiritual growth. We need places where we can be brutally honest and open about our attitudes and actions, even when they are not “Christian.”

A study of the Psalms is particularly conducive to this kind of healthy group atmosphere and interchange because the authors of Psalms are open and honest about their questions, doubts, and fears. These Old Testament authors give us permission and even model healthy emotional expression and process. As you guide the group with skill and a caring heart, women may actually change the way they think, feel, and act, especially related to their personal relationship with God. What a privilege!

LESSON 1

Celebrate Worship (Psalm 29)

PRAY AND SET GROUND RULES

Open with prayer. Should you pray or invite one of the participants to do so? Be sensitive to the women. If they're comfortable praying aloud, give them opportunity. If not, you, as the leader, pray.

Look over the study guide with your group and express your excitement about the topic. Discuss ground rules. Are there any off-limits topics—like politics or criticism of other churches—that you want to mention? Do you want to discourage women from bringing their children? Do you want to ask the participants to be respectful of views that differ from their own? Do you want to impress upon them the seriousness of confidentiality. You may want to write out a set of guidelines, hand them out, and discuss them the first time you meet. If women join later, remember to orient them.

Some women come to Bible study for the sole purpose of studying Scripture. Others come for community, to find friends. Regardless of your own bent, honor both desires. We all need a relationship with God through serious Bible study *and* we all need relationships through connecting in authentic community. Be sure the schedule reflects time for both.

LESSON STRUCTURE

The structure of lesson 1 is different from the structure of the other lessons. It begins with a brief commentary orienting the women. This orientation is divided into four parts:

- Why Study the Psalms?
- Background Information
- Overview of the Study
- Our Purposes Today

After the orientation, the study questions are divided into three parts. Getting acquainted questions are built into the “Make Connections” and “Preparation” question sets.

Lesson 1 can be studied as a unit or divided up, depending on the nature of your group. If the women in your group are strangers, you may want to limit your first meeting to the getting acquainted



questions, even develop some more questions of your own. You may choose to play an ice-breaker game. You might ask the women to bring a picture of a vacation or adventure. Ask them to tell why it was special. You may want to prepare a meal or organize a potluck—whatever builds community and fun.

FOR NEWCOMERS

If this group is new to the Bible, you might want to end your first gathering going through the introductory commentary—“Why Study the Psalms?” (pages 9–11)—together. Then ask the women to prepare the study questions on their own at home. Let them know that they will not be “put on the spot” or humiliated if they don’t understand a question or don’t come up with a “profound” answer. Explain that everyone is at a different place in their spiritual journey or level of Bible knowledge, and that the goal is simply individual growth. Help novices see that they may bring a fresh and interesting approach that will enliven the discussion.

FOR SEASONED GROUPS

If the group knows one another and prefers a more challenging format, you can ask them to prepare all of lesson 1 for discussion at the first session.

WILL YOU END WITH A WRAP-UP MESSAGE?

Leading small groups and teaching are different skills. The “Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders” provides sound principles to help you lead your group. Note that when you wear your small-group leader’s hat, you do not lecture! But you may want to end your time by putting on a teacher’s hat. Participants often enjoy hearing a message to crystallize biblical truth.

Your wrap-up might be a ten-minute informal presentation, allowing for interaction and questions, or a forty-five-minute formal lecture, more like a pastor’s Sunday message. If your study consists of several small groups, you may prefer a formal lecture. If you’re meeting in a home, your group may prefer a more interactive format. Use what works for you and your group.

Women love to hear their own leaders teach them rather than hear virtual teachers on DVD or over the Internet. At first, your skills may not be as honed as more experienced teachers, but in time and with practice you should improve. And you have advantages over a virtual teacher. Women need models they can watch, hug, and talk to. And when one of their own steps out and is used by God, it inspires everyone to step forward and use their gifts, too. So, if something in you says, “Teach!”—then go for it!

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE IDEAS

If you plan to include lecture in your format, you may want to familiarize the women with the Sacred Pathways listed in Gary Thomas's book of the same name (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000). The women should have fun identifying with the different ways people draw closer to God, and this awareness should make them more sensitive to the other women's preferences without passing judgment.

If you want to speak on the nature of worship, you will find helpful insight in the classic *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel* by Ronald Allen and Gordon Borror (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1982).

ENLIST WOMEN TO TEACH WITH YOU

Other women have something to say that would benefit the group. Listen attentively when they tell how God works in their lives. Identify women who inspire others. Who holds a high view of the Bible and has spent time studying? Who walks close to Jesus? Who lives wisely? Who is articulate? Passionate? Growing? Mature? Organized in their thinking?

If you add a teaching element to your Bible study format, consider asking one of these women to share a short testimony or deliver the message for the entire group that week. She will need a cooperative attitude. When you give a woman the platform, you give her influence. I've worked with a few women who took advantage of this opportunity. They spoke twice as long as time allotted. Or they refused to prepare, wandering aimlessly. Or they became so emotional that they broke down, upsetting women in the study.

To alleviate these problems, set a time limit and ask women to write out what they will say. Insist they review their message with you. Stress that if they're a "time hog," group time will be shorter, irritating group participants. Use wisdom as you select women presenters, but consider how much women will benefit by hearing a variety of voices.

RESOURCES TO HELP YOU TEACH WITH ACCURACY AND SKILL

Mathews, Alice P. *Preaching That Speaks to Women*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.

Robinson, Haddon. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001. (See also www.christiancourses.com for an online course.)

Stott, John. *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.

Willhite, Keith, and Scott Gibson, eds. *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching: Connecting the Bible to People*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998.

GENERAL RESOURCES TO STUDY THE PSALMS

Gaebelein, Frank. “Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs.” In *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991.

Spurgeon, Charles. *Psalms*. The Crossway Classic Commentaries. Volumes 1–2. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993.

Walvoord, John F., and Roy B. Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985.

RESOURCES ON SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES AND WORSHIP

Thomas, Gary. *Sacred Pathways*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000. (For more insight into ways different people draw close to God, this book is recommended.)

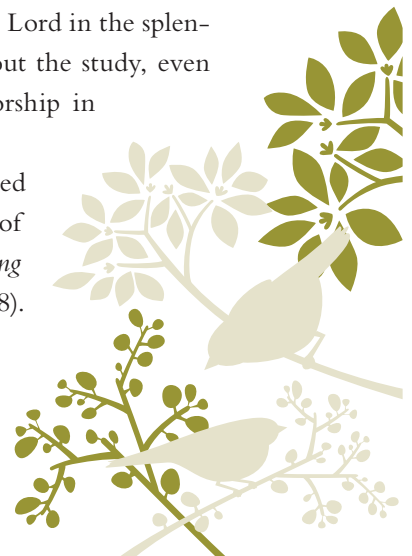
Winebrenner, Jan. *Intimate Faith: A Woman’s Guide to Spiritual Disciplines*. New York: Warner Faith, 2003. (This book is recommended if one wants to investigate seventeen often forgotten spiritual disciplines.)

PSALM 29: LESSON CONTENT

In David’s day, pagan gods were credited with creating powerful thunderstorms that moved across the land of the Canaanites, but David refuted these claims in Psalm 29. Instead, he credited the booming thunder and jolts of lightning as evidence that the one true God has power over all—the seas, lands, and even the deserts.

In verse 10, David refers to the great flood in the time of Noah—a flood that destroyed everything and everyone on the earth, except his faithful followers, Noah and his family. The point of the psalm is that although God’s power can be frightening, he shares his power with those who love and follow him, and he blesses their lives with a supernatural peace. As the faithful understand this reality, their response should parallel verses 1 and 2, where we are called to “worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.” This worship theme will continue throughout the study, even as we examine the various roadblocks to authentic heartfelt worship in subsequent lessons.

In the digging deeper question on page 18, the women are asked to identify different names ascribed to God. You will find names of God in books like Jill Briscoe’s *God’s Name, God’s Nature: Knowing God by His Old Testament Names* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1988).



CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Play “That’s My King!” from an inspiring sermon describing who God is by the late S. M. Lockridge. You can order this DVD from IgniterVideos (www.igniter-media.com).
- Ask volunteers to bring a CD of their favorite worship song. Ask them to explain why it is special and how it helps them draw closer to God.
- Play a variety of worship music, softly and without words, as you fellowship or discuss the lesson.
- Spend some time praying and worshipping God together.
- Read ancient prayers and creeds as a facet of your worship time together.

LESSON 2

Celebrate Intimacy (Psalm 139)

LESSON CONTENT

Worship is not egocentric. When we worship God we do not spotlight ourselves but instead focus on the grandeur and splendor of Almighty God. However, a flawed self-concept can obstruct healthy worship. For a variety of reasons, some women struggle to like themselves, allowing their hang-ups and pathologies to define them. Some of their unhealthy tendencies are the result of their own sin; sometimes others are to blame. Regardless of the causes, help the women see that if they want a healthy relationship with God, they need to work through these issues. The more they are at peace with themselves, the more they can glorify God.

Lesson 2 is designed to help women see and accept their true value to God. The lesson is structured around three questions and a response:

- Does God really know you? (vv. 1–6)
- Is God really near to you? (vv. 7–12)
- How carefully and purposefully has God made you? (vv. 13–18)
- The psalmist's response to God. (vv. 17–24)

The introductory section includes a personal reflection question. Unless your group is particularly transparent, do not discuss this question. Its purpose is to challenge the women to honest assessment as they begin their personal study.

Digging deeper questions on pages 29, 31, and 33 (bottom of the page) each ask women to define a particular attribute of God. These definitions may be helpful:

- *Omniscience*: God's ability to know everything past, present, and future; his limitless knowledge
- *Omnipresence*: God's ability and power to be everywhere present at the same time
- *Omnipotence*: God's ability and power to do whatever he wills

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 15 relates to abortion and other pro-life issues. Depending on the nature of your group, you may want to skip this question. If you tackle it, admonish the women to be respectful in their



interaction. You may be surprised at the tension and different perspectives in the group. Some of the women may have had abortions and this subject is extremely difficult for them to discuss. Others may be dealing with infertility and this topic unearths a strong emotional reaction toward women who choose abortion. If you are concerned that discussing this topic will be divisive or too painful, skip it. Just tell the women, as the leader, you have decided not to discuss this issue in the group. If a woman wants to know what you think, talk to her privately.

If you are unsure, you might want to email the women between lessons and ask their opinion. Their feedback may guide you in your decision. However, if you are leading a group that can handle the question kindly and respectfully, the interchange may be extremely productive and helpful.

The digging deeper question at the top of page 33 delves into the issue of the sovereignty of God and the free will of man. Psalm 139 proclaims that God knows how many years each of us will live but the Proverbs passages say that we can prolong our lives by obeying God. It seems that we can shorten our lives by acting foolishly. But how can both of these ideas be true?

The answer is a mystery. However, we have ample evidence in the Bible that from God's perspective both are true. God is able to see the past, present, and future all at once, so he knows what choices we will make, although our choices are freely made. For additional insight on this subject, which has stumped scholars for centuries, read J. I. Packer's book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961).

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Question 17 asks the women to create an art project that illustrates their personal value to God and their worshipful response to that truth. Give them ideas: a poem, story, picture, painting, sculpture, play, or object. You might want to give the women until the final week of the study to work on this project. Ask them to explain their art on the last day you meet. You may want to make this voluntary.
- If you ordered volume 1 of IgniterVideos to play "That's My King!" for lesson 1 (www.ignitermedia.com), you will notice that the DVD also includes a presentation titled "Psalm 139." Play this for the women as you conclude the lesson as a reminder of how well God knows them and loves them.

LESSON 3

Celebrate Hope (Psalm 42)

LESSON CONTENT

Feeling down or “blue” can interfere with our desire to worship God. We know we should not let dark emotions control us, but we sometimes do. And for women, hormones can play a role, making us moody or cranky. However, vacillating emotions are normal, at least to a degree. David struggled with his emotions in Psalm 42. When he was discouraged, he poured out his heart to God, confessing his spiritual dryness and refusing to close God out. Instead he modeled how to think and what to do. In the end, he returned to praising God despite his anguish.

How can you help women in your group overcome discouragement? Help them understand what to do and how to think. First, they must learn to identify when their emotions are attempting to take them hostage. Then they need to strategize a plan, and act on it. God can help, women can help one another, you can help, and lesson 3 can help.

If women water ski over the personal questions, fearful that transparency will result in judgment, then little progress is likely. But if they open their lives to one another, especially about the attitudes and actions they tend to hide, real change is possible. The response of the group is important at these times, and you, as the leader, can model healthy affirmation and coaching.

The atmosphere you set is vital to an honest discussion. If the women are struggling to trust one another, consider priming the pump by briefly sharing a time in your own life when you were discouraged, and how you overcame this feeling. If your group has bonded, be sure to keep your sharing short to give other women ample time.

YOUR RESPONSE TO TEARS

What should you do if someone breaks down in tears? You may be tempted to leave the lesson and spend the rest of the time consoling or trying to “fix” her problem. DON’T! Be sensitive, but also think of the group as a whole. Let her talk for a few minutes and respond kindly. Then either pray for her yourself or ask a group member to pray, someone you know would be comfortable doing so. Then proceed with the discussion. Assure the tearful woman that you will talk with her later, and be sure to follow through. She needs to hear what God has to say from



his Word related to her problems more than she needs an amateur counseling session from the group.

Later you will need to assess what kind of help she needs. Will a few minutes with you suffice? Do you need to meet at another time for a longer session? Do you know another woman who is particularly gifted at people-helping and has experience with her issue? Maybe connecting them would be helpful. Or does she need professional counseling?

How do you know when short-term discouragement is really long-term depression? If you observe that she has moved from normal sadness to more harmful responses that impair her daily functions, such as inability to work and care for loved ones, consider advising her to see a professional counselor. Also consider how long she has been experiencing these symptoms and whether she has sufficient cause. If she is a new widow or has lost a child, a year of grief is normal. However, if she cannot seem to carry on a daily routine, this has gone on for some months, and no normal reason is evident, help her find professional help.¹

TROUBLESHOOTING

The digging deeper question at the bottom of page 49 asks the women to explain the phrase “deep calls to deep.” This phrase is probably referring to David’s relationship with God. The “deep” in God calls to the “deep” in David and reminds him of their unchanging relationship characterized by love and joy.² David stands on the peak of Mount Hermon, lost in the thundering waterfall, and—despite his sadness—thanks God and looks to him for encouragement.

Question 27 asks, “If you or a loved one suffers with ongoing depression accompanied by physical symptoms, what action do you think should be taken?” I included this question in the lesson to ensure that you, as the leader, would have the opportunity to suggest professional help for women who might be clinically depressed. See above for a description of symptoms. If you need to refer a woman to a professional and you don’t know any, contact your church or a church you trust. They usually keep a list of professionals they could recommend.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

Make a bookmark or magnet of a deer beside a refreshing stream with the verse, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God” (Ps. 42:1) or use a mountain scene with a waterfall and the verse “Deep calls to deep” (Ps. 42:7a). Either will remind your group of the hope God provides even when we are discouraged.

LESSON 4

Celebrate Each Day (Psalm 90)

LESSON CONTENT

Most women in your group are probably busy, some may be exhausted, and some probably are not good stewards of their time. Lesson 4 is designed to help. The reasons are numerous—poor priorities, foolish choices, and luring distractions. When our lives lack purpose, balance, and productivity, we are less likely to feel that our lives count for the Lord. Moses wrote Psalm 90 to shake our complacency and help us acknowledge the brevity of our lives, hoping we would live productive lives more focused on the Lord.

Moses wrote, “Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days” (90:14). He knew that fruitful lifestyles result in joy and satisfaction, and that when we serve well, we worship well.

TROUBLESHOOTING

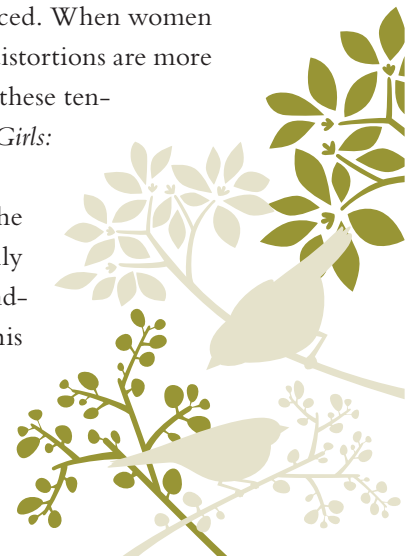
Question 8 asks the women to explain verse 4. The text relates to the differences in the way God perceives time and people perceive time. Charles Spurgeon wrote:

A thousand years! How much may be crowded into it—the rise and fall of empires, the glory and obliteration of dynasties, countless events, all important to household and individual. Yet this period is to the Lord as nothing.³

God is above time. In God’s economy of time, he sees the past, present, and future all at once.

Question 16 deals with a woman’s perception of God. If she sees God as angry with her, her understanding of God will be skewed. In addition, her view of herself as a woman and how she relates to men will be profoundly influenced. When women grow up with harsh earthly fathers or in a legalistic church, these distortions are more likely. If you notice that several women in your group suffer from these tendencies, consider leading them through my study titled *Daddy’s Girls: Discover the Wonder of the Father* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007).

Daddy’s Girls is primarily a study of the attributes of God the Father, while exploring a woman’s relationship with her earthly father, without “father-bashing.” Lesson topics include understanding God’s infinite yet transcendent nature, his trustworthiness, his



tender love, his sovereignty, his righteous jealousy, and his fairness. While leading *Daddy's Girls*, I discovered that only about a quarter of the women described their earthly dads as “a good father.” Other women used words like *passive*, *absent*, *distant*, *demanding*, and a few even used the word *seductive*. These women struggled to see their heavenly Father as he really is. As you guide women through question 16, you may identify women who need a better understanding of who God the Father really is. If so, *Daddy's Girls* might be transformational for them, and all will benefit from learning the true nature of their heavenly Father.

Question 17 may also help you identify women with unhealthy views of God. This question asks the students to differentiate between healthy and unhealthy *fear* of God. Some women are confused about this word. They think of fear as terror. However, fear of the Lord refers to reverence and awe, not terror, dread, or anxiety. On the other hand, some women think of God in such familiar terms that they forget he is holy, righteous, and all powerful. He is worthy of endless worship. When you discuss this question, if you observe either extreme being expressed, guide group members toward balance by soliciting perspectives from women who will give sound answers.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Is your group full of unorganized women who need instruction on ways to manage their lives more effectively and efficiently? Invite an expert from a local store or ministry to teach helpful skills.
- Do they need a sense of purpose? Consider supplying a spiritual gifts assessment and then discussing the results.
- Have you noticed particular strengths? Put a chair in the middle of the circle and give each woman a turn in the chair. Ask women in the group to comment on the positive characteristics they have observed in the woman on the hot seat, including ways she has blessed them or ways they believe she would be effective serving the Lord. Select a Bible verse that you believe fits each woman and present it to her in the form of a take-home computer-generated certificate. These methods provide meaningful encouragement, helping each one see herself as a valuable and gifted member of your community.

LESSON 5

Celebrate Security (Psalm 91)

LESSON CONTENT

Psalm 91 presents women in your group with another important reason to draw close to God—the blessings of rest and security. As Charles Spurgeon taught:

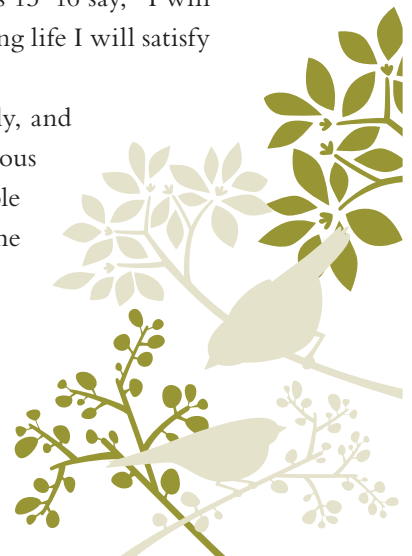
The blessings here promised are not for all believers, but for those who live in close fellowship with God. Every child of God looks toward the inner sanctuary and the mercy-seat, yet all do not dwell in the most holy place; they run to it at times, and enjoy occasional approaches, but they do not habitually reside in the mysterious presence. Those who through rich grace obtain unusual and continuous communion with God, so as to abide in Christ and Christ in them, become possessors of rare and special benefits, which are missed by those who follow afar off, and grieve the Holy Spirit.⁴

Psalm 91 promises the wonderful benefit of resting secure in Christ, regardless of outside circumstances. But, as Spurgeon argues, not all believers experience these blessings. However, *all* believers are secure in their eternal destiny. Be sure that your group understands this distinction. Understanding eternal security is foundational to a healthy Christian life.

You do want to challenge complacent women to a closer relationship with Jesus. Help them understand that when they dwell close to Christ, they depend on him, live in him, and rest in him. As they do, they will experience the wonderful blessings and benefits mentioned in the psalm.

However, the psalmist is not promising that they will never struggle or endure hardships. Living in a fallen world means these difficulties will be with us as long as we live in it. However, God will be *with us* in the struggles. Verses 15–16 say, “I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.”

Whatever happens externally, we have Jesus with us internally, and we have the promise that he will ultimately deliver us into his glorious care, even if we die. Like Paul and many other saints in the Bible who lived close to Christ, we can enjoy security and rest despite the storms of life. What a great reason to celebrate our amazing God!



TROUBLESHOOTING

The digging deeper question on page 80 asks the students to study one of the interchanges between Satan and Christ in the desert temptation. In Matthew 4:5–7, Satan quotes Psalm 91:11–12, but Jesus refutes Satan saying, “It is also written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Jesus teaches that we must be careful not to apply the promises in Psalm 91 foolishly. Scripture can be skewed to say many things that the Bible does not mean, and Jesus points out this error to the Devil.

Study the books below to become a skilled Bible interpreter.

RESOURCES

Fee, Gordon D., and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993.

Hendricks, Howard G., and William D. Hendricks. *Living by the Book*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1991.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Give each woman the opportunity to write down her greatest fear. Then bury or burn these papers as a symbol that the women are giving these fears to God. If you are in a church, check out the fire code first. Afterward, pray for each other. Play quiet instrumental music in the background. Conclude with worship, thanking God for his promises of security and protection when we dwell close to him.
- During your study, use a potted vine as a centerpiece to illustrate John 15.

LESSON 6

Celebrate Repentance (Psalms 51 and 32)

LESSON CONTENT

Why do some women in your group lack ongoing and vibrant worship experiences? The answer is unconfessed sin. Lesson 6 and lesson 7 on forgiveness together comprise a one-two punch designed to challenge women to do business with God. Culture and psychology tend to excuse sin. If we lie, we rationalize. If we gossip, we find ways to blame others.

The first step toward a repentant spirit is understanding that we all sin, we are all in process. David battled his sin nature and so do we. When we refuse to acknowledge our sin, we don't allow Jesus to cleanse us. But deep inside we know we are not right with God, so we draw back from him. We stop praying. We can't seem to muster the energy to worship with passion. But, of course, we keep this secret, not wanting others to think less of us. We may be God's child, redeemed by his grace, and still fall victim to this behavior. When we do, our fellowship with God is broken even though our place in heaven is assured.

Your role as a group leader is to create a place where women can be honest about their sin. Prime the pump by confessing your own sin. If other women do the same, be kind in your responses. Your compassion, like the Lord's, leads to repentance.

Remember that some women in your group have never confessed their abortion or premarital sex. They may be entertaining an affair or verbally abusing their children. Your goal is not necessarily to goad them into confessing these kinds of sins in the group, but pray that they will at least confess them privately to God. That's the first step toward renewing a healthy relationship with Jesus, and a step back onto the pathway to spiritual maturity and wholehearted worship.

LESSON STRUCTURE

Lesson 6 begins with David's plea for mercy (Ps. 51:1). The superscription reveals that this psalm is David's response to the prophet Nathan's rebuke over David's adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband. Don't skip over this question. God's unfailing love and compassion set the stage for softening the heart.

The digging deeper question on page 84 asks the women to do a word study of the Hebrew word *hesed*, meaning God's loyal and covenant-keeping love for his

own. This word is the Old Testament equivalent for the New Testament word *grace*. Emphasize that we are not forgiven because we deserve forgiveness but because of who God is—a gracious and covenant-keeping God.

Remember that the best discussion is not a discussion where you teach, but a discussion where the women discover these truths for themselves. Attempt to draw these concepts from the participants. Ask if anyone tackled the summit question. If not, you, as the leader, may want to explain the term *hesed* yourself, but if you do, be sure to replace your teacher's hat with your leader's hat quickly.

After studying the first verse of Psalm 51, the lesson moves the group into Nathan's rebuke (2 Sam. 12:1–24). This passage will familiarize the women with David's sin. This section also helps us understand that although we can be forgiven, we still must live with the consequences of our sin.

Next the lesson moves to Psalm 32:3–5, where we experience David's agony while he covered up his sin. Then under "The Nature of Humankind" (page 89), we move back to Psalm 51, and then later in the lesson back to Psalm 32. Hop scotching through the text may be more challenging for you to lead, and there will be more reading in this lesson than in others, but the placement of each piece is for a purpose. As you lead, transition carefully by referring to the passage you are discussing.

TROUBLESHOOTING

The digging deeper question on page 87 asks about the role of God's justice in salvation. Some participants may resist the concept of God as Judge, preferring to focus only on his love. However, the Bible is clear. God has the authority to judge the world.

The truth is that part of God's moral perfection is his perfection in judgment. Would a God who did not care about the difference between right and wrong be a good and admirable Being? Would a God who put no distinction between the beasts of history (the Hitlers and Stalins—if we dare use names) and his own saints be morally praiseworthy and perfect? Moral indifference would be an imperfection in God, not a perfection.⁵

Because God is just, he must judge our sin. But he has done so by sending his own Son, Jesus, to take our sin upon himself, so that we don't have to bear the weight of it ourselves.

The doctrine of the depravity of man is central to the question set entitled "The Nature of Humankind" (page 89). Women who are not familiar with this concept may resist, believing that people are essentially good. Question 13 asks the women to discuss this controversial topic. Don't be heavy-handed as you lead this question.

Allow for differences of opinion, but be sure to call on women you know will provide biblical insight.

Draw out arguments based on a child's rebellious nature. I usually tell about the time my oldest daughter, then three years old, stole a handful of candy from an open bin in the grocery store. As we walked to the car, I noticed her tiny fist clenched under her armpit. Strange, I thought. When I opened her fist, the look on her face gave away her guilt. Even at three years old, she knew this was wrong and hid her sin. We promptly marched back into the store where she returned her loot and apologized to the manager. I did not teach her to steal; stealing is part of her sin nature. Yet, today, she is a sold-out Christian wife, mother of two, and physical therapist who remembers this experience and does not steal.

Tell my story or one of your own to argue for the doctrine of depravity. Emphasize that everyone is born with this tendency to sin but correct any misconceptions about verse 5. In the NIV the verse reads: "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." But the KJV says: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." This second unfortunate translation has led some people to believe that David is casting a moral shadow on the sexual act. If women struggle with this verse or have been taught this erroneous view, show them the NIV version, closer to the original Hebrew. David is simply acknowledging that he, like all people, was born with a sin nature—a propensity to flaunt God's directives and go his own way.

Question 15 asks the difference between "worm theology" and healthy humility. To answer this question, author and preacher Chuck Swindoll quotes the rules posted on a children's clubhouse:

1. Nobody act big.
2. Nobody act small.
3. Everybody act medium.⁶

Spiritually and emotionally healthy women are believable and honest, regardless of their status or abilities. At the same time, they are not falsely humble, like Uriah Heep in Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*. They don't draw attention to themselves by acting wormy. Instead they are honest about their sin and shortcomings but aware of their value in Christ who died for them. Attempt to draw out the importance of humility without false humility—the wisdom of acting medium. Challenge the women to understand their natural depravity as well as the grace that covers it.

INVITE WOMEN TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S GRACE

Are there women in your small group who may not be Christians? Pray that God will identify these women, help you discern their readiness, and show you how to encourage them toward a relationship with Jesus. Women who thought they were Christians may realize that they are not, and may need you to help them understand how to come to authentic faith. Other passages clarifying the gospel are 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 (the gospel in a nutshell); Romans 3:23; 6:23; and John 5:24. Familiarize yourself with these verses in preparation. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your words and enable you to know what to say and when to say it. You may want to discuss how to become a Christian with the whole group and then challenge women to make a decision on their own or with you later. Tell them you would love to talk privately with anyone who would like to discuss salvation further. Use discretion, remembering salvation is the Spirit's work. Depend on God as you carry out his work of evangelism.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEA

Locate the song “Kindness” by Chris Tomlin, Jesse Reeves, and Louie Giglio, which says, “It’s your kindness, Lord, that leads us to repentance.” Listen to the song and discuss its meaning. Or find other songs with a similar theme.

LESSON 7

Celebrate Forgiveness (Psalm 103)

Lesson 7 is a companion study with lesson 6. Although each lesson can stand on its own, they are designed to be covered as a unit. Repentance is the mind-set and heart attitude that opens the door to keeping our slate clean before the Lord. Forgiveness is the wonderful release we feel when we know that our sin is not hindering our intimate fellowship with the Lord.

When we accept Jesus as our Savior, we need to acknowledge that we are a sinner and need his atoning sacrifice to cover our sin. At that time, we are forgiven for all our sins—past, present, and future. We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We have power in our lives to overcome transgressions. We are part of God’s forever family. We are heaven bound. However, our sin nature is still with us and we battle our flesh the rest of our lives. Unconfessed sin interferes with our intimate fellowship with God and our wholehearted worship.

Lesson 7 invites us to celebrate our salvation—the forgiveness of our sins because of what Jesus did on the cross. But we can also celebrate the kind process he provides to preserve our intimacy with God, a process that negates hindrances to intimate worship.

TROUBLESHOOTING

The digging deeper question on page 101 looks at a difficult passage: James 5:13–16. Some have used this text to argue that if we pray with faith, God is obligated to heal us.

The heart of the problem lies in just what James meant when he referred to the “sick.” Actually there is no reason to consider “sick” as referring exclusively to physical illness. The word *asthenei* literally means “to be weak.” It is generally used in Acts and the Epistles to refer to a weak faith or a weak conscience. James was not referring to the bedfast, the diseased, or the ill. Instead he wrote to those who had become weak both morally and spiritually in the midst of suffering. These are the ones who should call for the help of the elders of the church. . . . That the restoration is spiritual, not physical, is further clarified by the assurance, *if he has sinned, he will be forgiven.*⁷



God can and does heal our physical diseases, according to his will. But sometimes he chooses to glorify himself through our bodily ailments. However, our sins are always forgiven when we ask for mercy.

The digging deeper question on page 102 asks the student to research an eagle's life cycle in an attempt to decipher the author's meaning when he writes that God "satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." The author is probably alluding to the eagles' annual molting, when they shed old feathers that are replaced by new ones.

LESSON 8

Celebrate the Cross (Psalm 22)

David is believed to be the author of Psalm 22 but there is no record of David experiencing this kind of physical torment or execution. Apparently the prayer of the victim was answered because the psalm ends on a positive note. Hebrews 2:12 quotes Psalm 22:22 as the words of Jesus. For these reasons “the church has understood this psalm to be typological of the death of Jesus Christ.”⁸ When I taught this study, only one of my students disagreed with this interpretation. I referred her to various commentaries that all agreed with my view but she refused to change her thinking—so we agreed to disagree respectfully. You may encounter a similar dispute as you lead the group, on this topic or another. I suggest you do what we did and agree to disagree, respectfully, on your part at least. You cannot force others to do the same.

Seeing Christ’s crucifixion in Psalm 22 can change one’s understanding of the ordeal Jesus suffered on our behalf. There are many specific parallels:

- Verse 1: Jesus’ words on the cross
- Verse 2: The day of the crucifixion when darkness covered the land
- Verse 11: Jesus’ disciples did not stay to help him
- Verse 14: Crucifixion causes the bones to be out of joint
- Verse 15: Crucifixion causes extreme thirst
- Verse 16: Jesus’ hands and feet were pierced
- Verse 18: Soldiers gambled for his garment
- Verse 31: The Psalm’s last words are identical to Jesus’ final words on the cross

This magnificent psalm should enrich the women’s appreciation of the cross, resulting in deeper praise for the One who endured it.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEA

Would you like to give the women a memento of the study? Consider purchasing or making a cross for each one. Discount malls and online stores carry inexpensive jewelry. Pray over each gift before you hand them out, and let the women know you are praying for them.



LESSON 9

Celebrate the Crown (Psalm 98)

LESSON CONTENT

We began our study with Psalm 29—a praise psalm. We conclude with Psalm 98—another praise psalm, but also a royal psalm, focusing on worship to the King. In a sense, Psalm 98 synthesizes all we have studied. We sing and shout because we know our God intimately. We rejoice in the hope he offers every day. We revel in our secure position, the result of his great love for us. We understand how to “keep a clean slate” through repentance. We thank him for his matchless forgiveness, the kind that bought our ticket to heaven and the kind that ensures our close ongoing fellowship. We celebrate the cross that made all this possible, as we worship our beloved King of the universe and King of our hearts.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 2 asks the meaning of the verb tense in the second part of verse 1. The psalmist uses past tense to make the point that what God has promised is so sure that it is as good as done.

Question 16 may raise tensions in the group for women who insist that their church honor their musical preferences. They may feel that other kinds of worship do not honor God. The previous questions set the stage for this discussion, but you may need to preface this question with ground rules about listening respectfully to different perspectives. Pray that women with strong opinions on this subject will open their hearts and minds to other’s ideas. Pray for results that will strengthen churches and ministries for all peoples and generations. However, allow women to disagree. Simply verbalizing these feelings may result in changed hearts later.

“Here Comes the Judge” (pages 136–137) contains questions on the *bema*, the judgment seat for believers, where Christians’ good works will be evaluated but their eternal destiny will not be in jeopardy (1 Cor. 3:10–15). For additional insight read *The Bema: A Story About the Judgment Seat of Christ* (Gainesville, TX: Fair Havens Publications, 2000).

Use the “Looking Back, Looking Forward” (pages 138–140) questions either as a wrap-up to the series or tackle them on a separate day. Do you want to add a final day without a formal lesson but instead focused on food, fun, and fellowship? Ask the women to bring their art projects assigned in lesson 2. Give them time to



explain each one. Evaluate your time together and discuss whether you want to continue meeting. If so, get feedback on what the women would like to study together, although you as the leader will need to make the final decision, especially if they share different interests and requests. If time allows, a day to celebrate what you have learned provides closure and cements memories and learning.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Play a worship CD to set the tone of your time together.
- Spend some time at the end of the lesson worshipping God together. Plan a worship service with readings, art, and music. Ask the women to help you, each one contributing ways to worship that are most meaningful to them.
- Play the DVD *That's My King* to wrap up your worship time (www.ignitermedia.com).

NOTES

1. Interview with Dr. Charles Dickens, psychologist and chairman of the counseling department at Dallas Theological Seminary, July 11, 2008.
2. Charles Swindoll, *Living Beyond the Daily Grind* (New York: Inspirational Press, 1988), 122–23.
3. Charles Spurgeon, *Psalms: Volume 2*, The Crossway Classic Commentaries, ed. Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), 21.
4. *Ibid.*, 25.
5. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 130.
6. Charles Swindoll, *Home: Where Life Makes Up Its Mind* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1980), 31.
7. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 834–35.
8. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 908.