

GROW IN THE WORD

Blessed Is the One

an inductive group study of selected psalms

A. Samuel

The questions in this study are based on the [Grow in the Word Women's Workshop](#) led by Colleen McFadden at Bronx Household of Faith on Sept. 12, 2020.¹ Although some of the questions here are more detailed than those in her handouts, they are largely applications of her threefold emphasis: *Context, Structure, Jesus Christ*.

This study is intended to model one way to apply the approach taught in the workshop, in this case, to Old Testament poetry. You don't need to answer every question; the goal is to grow in your understanding of the *context, structure, connection to Christ, and application* of the psalm you're studying. Please refer to the recording or your notes/handouts from the workshop for clarification or more direction.

By God's grace, your knowledge of and therefore your love for the God of Scripture will grow deeper, richer, and stronger as you seek to understand what he reveals in these psalms. God bless your study together!

Structure of this Booklet

This booklet will guide you through the study of four psalms: 1, 2, 32, and 41. The study of each psalm is divided into four steps, except for the last session, which adds one final wrap-up for the whole study. The four steps are:

- Reading the Word in its **context** (A)
- Reading the Word in its **structure** (A)

- Reading the Word in light of **Jesus Christ** (B)
- **Applying** the Word you've read (B)

→ **For a 4-meeting study**, discuss all four steps for a particular psalm in one meeting.

→ **For an 8-meeting study**, discuss the first two steps (labeled A) of a section in one meeting and the last two steps (labeled B) in the next meeting.

Obviously your group is free to adjust this "schedule" as needed! You might also want to spend your first meeting talking through the introductory notes that start on the next page.

Studying as a Group

The most effective approach to using this study is probably for each member to work through the questions individually throughout the week(s), and then to get together with the group to compare notes. If that's not possible you can certainly work through the study together! If you do that, you might find it necessary to only answer the most relevant questions from each part of the session.

Simplifying the Study

An alternative to using this booklet would be to use the more basic questions included in the appendix on page 27. Your group can simply get together, read the passage for the week, and work through those questions together. You could always use the questions in the main part of this booklet as a supplement or for personal study.

¹ Some questions are also taken/adapted from David Helm's *One-to-One Bible Reading: A Simple Guide for Every Christian*, 86–87.

Some notes before you start studying...

The psalms are songs. More specifically, they are *lyrics* to songs. Think about the lyrics to songs you love best. How do they “work”? Usually not by making logical arguments, but by using vivid imagery and striking, memorable language. Lyrics also use the rhythms and sounds of language in ways that color the word-pictures and affect our responses.

So as you study these four psalms, it’s important to remember the type of literature, or *genre*, this is. You are studying *poetry*.

Remembering the genre will help you stay sensitive to how poetry usually works. This will help you gather more from your study of the psalms than what you would get if you simply read them and waited for a line to “pop out” at you.

Studying the Psalms is like exploring a city. You could just look at the skyline and see which building stands out and makes the biggest impression on you. But if you start traveling the *streets* of the city, you’ll find there’s much more to it than just the biggest buildings. Think of *studying* a psalm as traveling through a city; the “tools” outlined below are your travel guide to help you know what to look for.

Here are basic things to look for in studying psalms:

1) Parallelism

We often think of poems as lines that rhyme:

*Roses are red, violets are blue.
I like flowers, how about you?*

Remember that our psalms are translated into English from Hebrew. But even in the original Hebrew, these psalms didn’t rhyme. Hebrew poetry doesn’t usually rhyme “sounds.” Instead, most Hebrew poetry rhymes *ideas* by using sets of lines (usually 2 lines each set) that match or “parallel” each other. There are different kinds of parallelism in Hebrew poetry. Here are the main types:

➤ **Synonymous Parallelism**

The most basic kind of parallelism is when two ways of making the same basic point give us a richer picture by inviting us to note the way the lines reinforce each other.

For example, in Psalm 1:2, we read of the blessed man,

Line 1: *but his delight is in the law of the Lord,*
Line 2: *and on his law he meditates day and night.*

In some ways these lines are saying the same thing, describing this man as someone centered on God’s Word. Yet they also work together to create a more detailed picture. The first line shows the *emotional* side of this Word-centeredness, and shows how deep it is. The second line shows the *mind* is engaged, and also adds the element of time: “day and night,” showing how constant it is.

The lines are not identical, but they are *parallel*, and they are intended to be viewed as a set.

➤ **Progressive Parallelism**

You could also think of this as “step” or “staircase” parallelism. In this kind of parallelism, two (or sometimes more) lines also form a set, but each line clearly adds a next *step* to the image being painted.

For example, look at how each of these three lines from Psalm 1:1 add an image that builds on the line that came before:

Line 1: *who **walks** not in the counsel of the wicked,*
Line 2: *nor **stands** in the way of sinners,*
Line 3: *nor **sits** in the seat of scoffers;*

Noticing that this is *step* parallelism and not *synonymous* parallelism helps you pay attention to the fact that each of these pictures describes something slightly more problematic—there’s a downward spiral here! These three lines are not just different ways of saying the same thing.

One of the clearest uses of step parallelism in the book of Psalms is Psalm 29. For example, the first two verses:

Line 1: *Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings,*
Line 2: *ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.*
Line 3: *Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name.*

➤ **Synthetic Parallelism**

In this type of “parallelism,” the second line adds to or finishes the thought of the first with essential information, as we see in Psalm 23:3b:

Line 1: *He guides me in paths of righteousness*
Line 2: *for his name’s sake*

Breaking this into two lines invites us to reflect on how important the second line is as a qualifier of the first line: it tells us *why* God is committed to guiding his sheep in righteous paths—a very encouraging thing to remember!

Another example of synthetic parallelism is Proverbs 21:1. In this verse, the second line explains clearly the meaning of the first line:

Line 1: *The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord;*
Line 2: *he turns it wherever he will.*

➤ **Antithetical Parallelism**

In this type of parallelism, one line lays out a truth and the next line shows the reverse or opposite truth. For example, Psalm 1:6:

Line 1: *For the LORD knows the way of the righteous*
Line 2: *but the way of the wicked will perish*

These two lines go together. We are intended to consider *both* truths as a set, and how they apply to us as a whole. The fact that the LORD knows the way of the righteous is made all the more glorious considering the alternative, and that the wicked will perish is all the more tragic considering the righteous enjoy God’s watchful presence! The contrast *between* the truths highlights the weight of *each* truth.

Identifying types of parallelism is not an exact science. Don’t get worked up if you come across sets of lines that don’t seem to fit these categories. But, it *is* helpful to know that many psalms proceed by *sets* of two (sometimes more) lines; knowing these types of parallelism can help you recognize and think about these sets of lines more effectively.

To review, why don’t you try your hand at writing your own sets of parallel lines in the spaces below?

Synonymous Parallelism

Progressive Parallelism

Synthetic Parallelism

Antithetical Parallelism

2) Imagery

Another “tool” or lens to look through as you explore these psalms is to think about a psalm in terms of what *images* it’s calling to mind.

Noting what images a psalm uses wakes our imaginations. It helps us make connections with other parts of Scripture and with concrete aspects of our daily lives—prompting deeper reflection on how the psalm speaks to *our* desires, emotions, and situations.

For example, the imagery of Psalm 1:1 calls our imaginations to picture life as a journey along a road. We are invited by the imagery to consider how our character, even our destiny, involves who we’re traveling with and who we’re settling down with. The road imagery carries over into v. 2 by creating a connection with passages like Deuteronomy 6:5–7:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

The imagery in v. 3 is of a fruitful tree and useless chaff. It invites us to think of our lives in these categories. The imagery of bearing fruit helps us to ask questions like, “What kind of fruit does God want me to cultivate?” (see Galatians 5, for example) and “What are the roots of the fruit my life is bearing?” “Am I getting the nourishment I need from the gospel? From the Word? from the church?” “What truths and practices must I embrace to cultivate fruit?” It also helps us to put our entire Christian life in the context of God’s grace. When we picture the tree and the stream, we begin to wonder: Who provides the stream? Who plants us there? Who ultimately makes fruit grow? Rich imagery gives rise to rich questions.

3) Repetition

Repetition of key words or phrases can help alert us to the main focus of a psalm.

So in Psalm 1, for example, it is interesting to reflect on why the repeated word “way,” which appears at the beginning and the end, is used in describing the *blessed* person, when we might tend to think of blessing in terms of a person’s status or situation.

4) Making Connections to Christ²

In Luke 24:25–27, Jesus says that every part of the Old Testament, including the Psalms, is about him.

Now, there are some ways in which specific verses in the book of Psalms clearly point to or prophesy about Jesus. For example, Psalm 22:16–18 predicts exactly what happens to Jesus when the Roman soldiers crucify him (“they have pierced my hands and feet”) and cast lots for his clothing!

But there are more subtle ways that the whole book of Psalms and every individual psalm call us to turn to Christ:

²The categories used here are from Iain Duguid, professor of Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary.

➤ **The Representative Singer**

Jesus, who is truly God, has also become truly man. And in his life on earth, he lived as a faithful Jew. The psalms were originally written to be the prayer book and song book of the Jewish people; as a righteous Jewish man Jesus learned and loved the book of Psalms. He prayed these psalms along with faithful Jews throughout history. He believed them. He meant them. He felt them. Whenever we study a psalm, we are reading words that our Savior also studied, meditated on, believed, and sang.

In fact, he sang the psalms with all his heart. When he sang songs of truth, he sang them with full conviction. When he sang songs of lament, he felt their sorrow—indeed, he fully experienced all the agonies the Psalms describe, except that he was without sin. When he sang songs calling for justice, he did so from a pure and genuine desire to see God bring his promises to pass. When he sang songs of praise, he did so from a full heart of love, adoration, and trust in his father.

To put it another way, Jesus sang the Psalms the way God intended them to be sung. He received them as the gift they are. He believed them as the truth they are. He expressed them as the praise they are. And he did so in our place. He did so as the one whose righteous life—including his whole-hearted psalm-singing—both leads us as our example and represents us as our Savior. He is the representative Singer.

➤ **The Supreme Singer**

The psalms point us to Christ in another way. Jesus is not just the perfect “representative” singer—he is the one whom all the psalms about the *righteous*, the *upright*, and the “*blessed*” rightly apply to. When the psalms talk about the blessed man who delights in the law of God, only Jesus fulfills that description *perfectly*. He is the *supreme* singer.

Jesus is also the “supreme” singer in the way he stands as the ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic kingship. Many of the psalms were written by king David. It is through a Davidic descendant, an anointed king, the Messiah, that Israel’s God has chosen to rule over and rescue his people. In many of the psalms, God showing his faithfulness to David/the Davidic king is the *way* in which he plans to show his faithfulness to his people in general. This is supremely the case with Christ, through whom we receive *all* the heavenly blessings (Ephesians 1:3).

Jesus also supremely fulfills all the psalms of lament and suffering. He does not just suffer *with* his people, he does not even suffer *for* his people—but he suffers in a way that no other person ever could, bearing in himself a spiritual agony unlike anything the writers of the psalms themselves could have borne. In every psalm of suffering and lament, the depth of Christ’s supreme suffering on the cross is foreshadowed—in a way that puts our suffering in perspective and holds up *his* suffering as the surprising source of our hope and perseverance through trials! At the same time, Jesus’s victory over sin, Satan, and the grave brings to supreme fullness the descriptions and promises of victory in the psalms. He is the supreme victor.

Finally, Jesus is the supreme singer because he is not just the Messiah, but he is also God the Son. In some mysterious way, every psalm that declares praise to God, every psalm that describes the sovereignty, glory, faithfulness, and supremacy of God, is at the same time describing Jesus Christ.

➤ The Returning Singer

Many of the psalms leave us longing for and waiting for a day when God will bring all of his promises to complete fullness, put an end to his enemies, and establish his covenant people in security and joy. Psalm 1 itself ends with a promise that even in our day has yet to be fulfilled: “The way of the wicked will perish.” Though wicked individuals all *do* perish, the fact that wickedness continues on the earth shows that this psalm has yet to be fulfilled. In the same way, God’s people die, and if that is the end of the story, then many psalms—like the end of Psalm 23—leave us with the question of whether God has told the truth.

The resurrection of Christ is the guarantee that God will fulfill his promise to individual Christians. Death will not have the final word. We *will* live in the house of God forever (Psalm 23:6). But there is more to it than that. Jesus, our representative singer, the supreme singer, will one day return. When he does, he will put an end to all evil once and for all. The dead in Christ will rise, and he will bring to pass in glorious and surprising fullness all the promises of God that the psalms leave ringing in our ears. At that time, the “Hallelujahs” of the psalms will begin to ring throughout the world in a way that we cannot now imagine.

5) Applying the Psalms to Ourselves

Reading the psalms in light of Christ ought to come *before* applying them to ourselves. After all, we are Christians, not Jews. Christ is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets; that changes how we apply these parts of God’s Word to ourselves.

But if we *never* apply the psalms to ourselves, we miss their purpose. They are *God’s word to us*.

Also, in a unique way, as songs for worship, the psalms are also given us by God to be and to shape *our words to God*.

So these psalms are given by God to inform our minds, to shape our affections, to strengthen our faith, *and* to express our hearts. Psalms are not just for “taking in,” but for “speaking out,” both individually and as a body of believers. They aren’t just given to teach us about God, but about *relating* to God. They are gifts from God encouraging us to pour out our hearts to him in prayer, given as words we can use for that very purpose!

SECTION 1: PSALM 1

Reading the Word in its context

{Session 1A}

*Pray. Read **Psalm 1**:*

Psalm 1

¹Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
²but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
³He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.
⁴The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
⁵Therefore the wicked will 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 wicked will perish.

1) *Historical context:*

- a. Read Genesis 1:26–28 and Genesis 12:1–3; look at Deuteronomy chapters 11 and 28. Read Deuteronomy 7:6–8, and 9:4–6.

Does God owe his blessing to those who obey him? How does the history of how God brings blessing to his people (and who gets to belong to his people) shed light on this psalm?

- b. The psalms, at least some of them, were intended to be sung corporately, at the temple. How might Psalm 1 shape/guide a people's expectations of worship, given its place as the first psalm in the book of Psalms?
- c. Do we know who the author/singer is? If so, what are basic things we know about him that seem relevant?

2) *Literary context:*

- a. As the first psalm in the book of Psalms, Psalm 1 introduces some of the most important themes in the whole book. List some of those themes. If you want to, come up with a symbol for each theme so you can mark it if it reappears in the psalms you'll study next.
- b. What are the words, if any, you need to look up? Write down any definitions you find here. (You could look them up in other parts of the Bible or refer to a Bible dictionary or commentary.)

- 1) Who are the major characters? Briefly describe them.

- 2) Try to divide the psalm into parts. Indicate:
 - a. What are the major parts/chunks?
 - b. What are the sets of parallel lines? (Hint: Not every “set” is just two lines—the first set of this psalm could be seen as the first *four* lines. Also, sometimes psalms contain standalone lines. Don’t get hung up on being exact.)

- 3) Label any sets of lines that you can with the type of parallelism they use.

- 4) Mark any images you find. What might be the intended effect on the audience?

- 5) What are the main turning points/shifts in the psalm’s imagery or focus?

- 6) How does the imagery of the psalm (i.e., what pictures the words are painting) reinforce/color the point being made? (E.g., how does the image of a tree express more than just “be serious about the law”?)

- 7) How do the beginning and/or final lines of the psalm guide our attention to the author’s key concerns? (“The psalmist wants his readers to know/feel/be shaped by_____”)

- 8) Are there any questions or commands? What might be the reason for putting them in this form?

- 9) What emotions is the author arousing? What surprises are there?

- 10) Try to capture the main point of the psalm in your own words: Who is the blessed person, according to Psalm 1?

- 1) What are similarities and differences between the situation in Psalm 1 (Old Testament Israel) and our day (New Testament church)?
- 2) Is any part of this psalm quoted or talked about clearly in the New Testament? (Check cross references or use a study Bible.) If so, what does the New Testament say about it?
- 3) What images or key words in Psalm 1 are developed in the New Testament, and how does the New Testament connect these specifically to Jesus?
- 4) In Matthew 5, Jesus expands significantly on the book of Psalms' picture of "the blessed person." How does Jesus's "Sermon on the Mount" from that chapter shed light on Psalm 1?
- 5) How does Christ fulfill this psalm as...
 - a. Representative singer?
 - b. Supreme singer?
 - c. Returning singer?

(See the intro notes on pages v–vii of this booklet for more on these categories.)

- 6) Is Jesus clearly identified in the New Testament as the fulfillment or embodiment of any of the images, terms, concepts or characters in Psalm 1? In other words, does the New Testament show us that Jesus is who this psalm is talking about? If so, where and how?
- 7) Covenantal context: The Old Testament Law required Israelites to be ceremonially clean and offer sacrifices in order to participate in worship at the temple. In other words, to even *sing* about "The blessed one" with God's people required forgiveness and cleansing through sacrifice.

So how does who Jesus is for us and what he's done for us influence how we think about this psalm's teaching? How is blessing connected to keeping and loving God's law? How is it connected to trusting in Jesus? Are these mutually exclusive?

- 8) Try to sum up the meaning and application of this passage with reference to Christ by using the following phrase to get started; include Christ in your summary sentence:
"God wants you to know that...and to respond by..."
or
"Blessed is the one..."

Reflect on and then discuss answers to some or all of the following questions:

- 1) Which of the three “ways” in v. 1 have characterized me in the past? Which am I most drawn to in the present?

- 2) In what ways does this passage lead me to consider who Christ is for me?

- 3) In what ways does this passage show me who I am in Christ?

- 4) How does it call me toward faith? How does it call me toward faithfulness?

- 5) What promises or pictures does it use to motivate trust and obedience? What promises or pictures does it use to warn of disobedience?

- 6) Is there someone’s example I’m intended to follow? What might that look like in my situation?

- 7) How does this passage call on me to change the way I live, think, or feel? The way I pray?

What are ways I can pursue this?

- 8) How does this passage lead me to worship?

- 9) What worldly counterfeit of what it means to be “blessed” most closely resembles *this* psalm? What’s missing in that counterfeit that the truths of Psalm 1 provide? In other words, what’s the world’s ‘fake’ version of the blessedness this psalm presents, and what is that fake version missing?
- 10) How does this correct or shed light on my own view of what it means to be “blessed”?
- 11) Sum up the application of this passage using the blank to identify those whom the passage most directly addresses. Build on your answer to question 8 from the previous section. Include Christ in your answer.

*“God wants those who _____ to know that... **and to respond by...**”*
or *“I am blessed, because...”*

Pray.

Pray. Read Psalm 2:

Psalm 2

¹Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?
²The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying,
³“Let us burst their bonds apart
and cast away their cords from us.”

⁴He who sits in the heavens laughs;
the Lord holds them in derision.
⁵Then he will speak to them in his wrath,
and terrify them in his fury, saying,
⁶“As for me, I have set my King
on Zion, my holy hill.”

⁷I will tell of the decree:
The Lord said to me, “You are my Son;
today I have begotten you.
⁸Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.
⁹You shall break them with a rod of iron
and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

¹⁰Now therefore, O kings, be wise;
be warned, O rulers of the earth.
¹¹Serve the Lord with fear,
and rejoice with trembling.
¹²Kiss the Son,
lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,
for his wrath is quickly kindled.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

1) *Historical context:*

- a. Are there any clues about the historical situation that led to this psalm being written? What are they?
- b. What Old Testament events/developments might be relevant to this psalm?
- c. Are there any people or places mentioned? If so, what are key facts about them that seem relevant to this psalm?
- d. Are other scenes or themes of the Old Testament mentioned or alluded to in this text? If so, what are they?

2) *Literary Context:*

- a. Psalms 1 and 2 are widely seen as the *introduction* to the book of Psalms. What unique theme(s) does this psalm add as part of the introduction that don't appear in Psalm 1? Why might this/these be significant in our understanding of how God views *blessing*?
- b. If you want to, come up with a symbol for each major theme so you can mark it if it reappears in the psalms you'll study next. Mark any major themes that are repeated from Psalm 1.
- c. What lines/words in Psalm 2 link it with Psalm 1?
- d. What are words, if any, that you need to look up? Are there any phrases whose meaning you need to clarify (e.g., "kiss the son")?

- 1) Who are the major characters? Briefly describe them. Is the narrator involved? If so, how?
- 2) Who's speaking throughout the psalm? Who are the different speakers, or is there only one? Who is the "audience" of the psalm? Do different parts get addressed to different groups or people? Indicate if so.
- 3) Try to divide the psalm into parts:
 - a. What are the major parts/chunks?
 - b. What are the sets of parallel lines?
- 4) Label any sets of lines that you can with the type of parallelism they use.
- 5) Mark any images you find. What might be the intended effect on the audience?
- 6) How does the imagery of the psalm (i.e., what pictures the words are painting) reinforce/color the point being made? In other words, how does the image bring the point to life?
- 7) What are the main turning points/shifts in the psalm's imagery or focus? Is there a "climax" in the psalm? Where is it?
- 8) How do the beginning and/or final lines of the psalm guide our attention to the author's key concerns? ("The psalmist wants his readers to know/feel/be shaped by_____.")
- 9) Are there any questions or commands? What might be the reason for putting them in this form?
- 10) What emotions is the author arousing? What surprises are there?
- 11) Try to capture the main point of the psalm in your own words: Who is the blessed person, according to Psalm 2?

- 1) What are similarities and differences between the situation in Psalm 2 (Old Testament Israel) and our day (New Testament church)?

- 2) What images or key words are developed in the New Testament, and how does the New Testament connect these specifically to Jesus?

- 3) Is any part of this psalm quoted or talked about clearly in the New Testament? (Check cross references or use a study Bible.) If so, what does the New Testament say about it?

- 4) In Matthew 5, Jesus expands significantly on the book of Psalms' picture of "the blessed person." How does Jesus's "Sermon on the Mount" from that chapter shed light on Psalm 2?

- 5) How does Christ fulfill this psalm as...
 - a. Representative singer?

 - b. Supreme singer?

 - c. Returning singer?

- 6) Is Jesus clearly identified in the New Testament as the fulfillment or embodiment of any of the images, terms, concepts or characters in Psalm 2? In other words, does the New Testament tell us that Jesus is who this psalm is talking about?

- 7) Try to sum up the meaning and application of this passage with reference to Christ by using the following phrase to get started; include Christ in your summary sentence:
"God wants you to know that...and to respond by..."
or
"Blessed is the one..."

Reflect on and then discuss answers to some or all of the following questions:

- 1) What parallels to the “raging nations” do we find in our day?

- 2) How does the description of God’s reaction to them challenge/encourage us?

- 3) Which image from Psalm 2 is most helpful/vivid to you? Why?

- 4) How does this passage point me to Jesus’s sufficiency for me? How does it point to his authority over me?

- 5) Are there particular commands to be obeyed? What particular aspects of my life does it most directly address?

- 6) What promises or pictures does it use to motivate trust and obedience? What promises or pictures does it use to warn of disobedience?

- 7) Is there someone’s example I’m intended to follow? What might that look like in my situation?

- 8) How does this passage call on me to change the way I live, think, or feel? The way I pray?

What are ways I can pursue this?

- 9) How might this passage particularly help a Christian who is...
- straying?
 - idle?
 - fainthearted?
 - weak?
 - suffering?

(These categories are mostly drawn from 1 Thessalonians 5:14.)

Which is most relevant to *you* right now? Why?

- 10) How does this passage inform or direct how I relate to...

- God through Jesus?
- my church?
- other believers?
- the world?

- 11) What are specific ways my church community should be challenged and/or encouraged through this?
How can I/we contribute to making that happen?

- 12) How does this passage lead me to worship?

- 13) What worldly counterfeit of what it means to be “blessed” most closely resembles *this* psalm? What’s missing in that counterfeit that the truths of Psalm 2 provide? In other words, what’s the world’s ‘fake’ version of the blessedness this psalm presents, and what is that fake version missing?

- 14) How does this correct or shed light on my view of what it means to be “blessed”?

- 15) Sum up the application of this passage using the blank to identify those whom the passage most directly addresses. Build on your answer to question 7 from the previous section.

*“God wants those who _____ to know that... **and to respond by...**”
or “I am blessed, because...”*

Pray.

Pray. Read **Psalm 32**:

Psalm 32

A Maskil of David.

¹Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.

²Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

³For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.

⁴For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selab*

⁵I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selab*

⁶Therefore let everyone who is godly
offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;
surely in the rush of great waters,
they shall not reach him.

⁷You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. *Selab*

⁸I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

⁹Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
which must be curbed with bit and bridle,
or it will not stay near you.

¹⁰Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord.

¹¹Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

1) *Historical context:*

- a. Who is the author? Why might this heighten the significance of the fact that the psalms were written for *public worship*?
- b. What clues are there about the historical situation that led to the writing of this psalm?
- c. Based on the rest of Scripture, are there any particular points in David's life this might be referring to? What is the general *type* of life situation that this psalm speaks to universally?

2) *Literary Context:*

- a. Are there any tie-ins that you notice between this psalm and Psalms 1 and 2? What are they?
- b. Do you notice any clear connection with any other psalms you know? Do you notice any imagery or language that connects to other themes or passages of Scripture?
- c. What are words, if any, that you need to look up? Are there any phrases whose meaning you need to clarify?

- 1) Who are the major characters? Briefly describe them. Is the narrator involved? If so, how?
- 2) Who's speaking throughout the psalm? Who are the different speakers, or is there only one? Who is the "audience" of the psalm? Do different parts get addressed to different groups or people? Indicate if so.
- 3) Try to divide the psalm into parts:
 - a. What are the major parts/chunks?
 - b. What are the sets of parallel lines?
- 4) Label any sets that you can with the type of parallelism they use.
- 5) Label any images you find. What might be the intended effect on the audience? How does the imagery of the psalm (i.e., what pictures the words are painting) reinforce/color the point being made? In other words, how does the image bring the point to life?
- 6) Are there any repetitions that highlight key truths? What are they? (Obviously the parallel lines include repetitions, but are there any other repetitions beyond that?)
- 7) What are the main turning points/shifts in the psalm's imagery or focus? Is there a "climax" in the psalm? Where is it?
- 8) Does the end of the psalm seem intended to leave us with a particular truth ringing in our ears? If so, what is it?
- 9) How do the beginning and/or final lines of the psalm guide our attention to the author's key concerns? ("The psalmist wants his readers to know/feel/be shaped by_____.")
- 10) Are there any questions or commands? What might be the reason for putting them in this form?
- 11) What emotions is the author arousing? What surprises are there?
- 12) Try to capture the main point of the psalm in your own words: Who is the blessed person, according to Psalm 32?

- 1) What are similarities and differences between the situation in Psalm 32 (Old Testament Israel) and our day (New Testament church)?
- 2) What images or key words are developed in the New Testament, and how does the New Testament connect these specifically to Jesus?
- 3) Is any part of this psalm quoted or talked about clearly in the New Testament? (Check cross references or use a study Bible.) If so, what does the New Testament say about it?
- 4) In Matthew 5, Jesus expands significantly on the Psalms' picture of "the blessed person." How does Jesus's "Sermon on the Mount" from that chapter shed light on Psalm 32?
- 5) How does Jesus compare or contrast to the psalmist, David? How does Jesus reflect the character of God we see in this psalm?
- 6) How does Christ fulfill this psalm as...
 - a. Representative singer?
 - b. Supreme singer?
 - c. Returning singer?
- 7) How is Psalm 32 different from what you would expect someone from another religion—a Muslim, for example—to say on these topics?
- 8) Covenantal context: The Old Testament Law required Israelites to be ceremonially clean and offer sacrifices in order to participate in worship at the temple. In other words, to even *sing* about "The blessed one" with God's people required forgiveness and cleansing through sacrifice.

So how does who Jesus is for us and what he's done for us influence how we think about this psalm's teaching? How is blessing connected to keeping and loving God's law? How is it connected to trusting in Jesus? Are these mutually exclusive?

- 9) Try to sum up the meaning and application of this passage with reference to Christ by using the following phrase to get started; include Christ in your summary sentence:
"God wants you to know that...and to respond by..."
or
"Blessed is the one..."

Reflect on and then discuss answers to some or all of the following questions:

- 1) What is most challenging/convicting about this psalm?

- 2) Which section most directly relates to something God is calling you to believe or do? To your present challenges? Your present joys?

- 3) How have you seen Psalm 32 to be true? If you haven't, talk about why you think that is.

- 4) In what ways does this passage lead me to consider who Christ is for me? In what ways does this passage show me who I am in Christ?

- 5) How does the presence/personhood of God matter, according to the psalm?

- 6) How does this passage point me to Jesus's sufficiency for me? How does it point to his authority over me?

- 7) Are there particular commands to be obeyed? What particular aspects of my life does it most directly address?

- 8) What promises or pictures does it use to motivate trust and obedience? What promises or pictures does it use to warn of disobedience?

- 9) Is there someone's example I'm intended to follow? What might that look like in my situation?

- 10) How does this passage call on me to change the way I live, think, or feel? The way I pray?

What are ways I can pursue this?

11) How might this passage particularly help a Christian who is...

- straying?
- idle?
- fainthearted?
- weak?
- suffering?

(These categories are mostly drawn from 1 Thessalonians 5:14.)

Which is most relevant to you right now?

12) How does this passage inform or direct how I relate to...

- God through Jesus?
- my church?
- other believers?
- the world?

13) What are ways my church community should be challenged and/or encouraged through this? How can I/we contribute to making that happen?

14) How does this passage lead me to worship?

15) How does this correct or shed light on my view of what it means to be “blessed”?

16) What worldly counterfeit of what it means to be “blessed” most closely resembles *this* psalm? What’s missing in that counterfeit that the truths of Psalm 32 provide? In other words, what’s the world’s ‘fake’ version of the blessedness this psalm presents, and what is that fake version missing?

17) Sum up the application of this passage using the blank to identify those whom the passage most directly addresses. Build on your answer to question 9 from the previous section.

*“God wants those who _____ to know that... **and to respond by...**”
or “I am blessed, because...”*

Pray.

*Pray. Read **Psalm 41**:*

Psalm 41

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David.

¹Blessed is the one who considers the poor!

In the day of trouble the Lord delivers him;

²the Lord protects him and keeps him alive;

he is called blessed in the land;

you do not give him up to the will of his enemies.

³The Lord sustains him on his sickbed;

in his illness you restore him to full health.

⁴As for me, I said, “O Lord, be gracious to me;

heal me, for I have sinned against you!”

⁵My enemies say of me in malice,

“When will he die, and his name perish?”

⁶And when one comes to see me, he utters empty words,

while his heart gathers iniquity;

when he goes out, he tells it abroad.

⁷All who hate me whisper together about me;

they imagine the worst for me.

⁸They say, “A deadly thing is poured out on him;

he will not rise again from where he lies.”

⁹Even my close friend in whom I trusted,

who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.

¹⁰But you, O Lord, be gracious to me,

and raise me up, that I may repay them!

¹¹By this I know that you delight in me:

my enemy will not shout in triumph over me.

¹²But you have upheld me because of my integrity,

and set me in your presence forever.

¹³Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,

from everlasting to everlasting!

Amen and Amen.

1) *Literary context:*

- a. This psalm brings Book One of the Psalms to a close. What are ways Psalm 41 is a fitting end to Book One?
- b. Are there any repeated words or concepts from Psalms 1 and 2? What are they?

2) *Historical Context:*

- a. Briefly describe the personal or historical situation pictured in this psalm.
- b. The heading says this psalm is “Of David.” How might this be relevant to the content of the psalm? How might it shed light on some of the “harsher” statements contained in the psalm?
- c. Are there any people, words or places you need to look up? (You could look them up in other parts of the Bible or refer to a Bible dictionary or commentary.) Briefly note what you discover.

- 1) Who are the major characters? Briefly describe them. Is the narrator involved? If so, how?
- 2) Who's speaking throughout the psalm? Who are the different speakers, or is there only one? Who is the "audience" of the psalm? Do different parts get addressed to different groups or people? Indicate if so.
- 3) Try to divide the psalm into parts:
 - a. What are the sets of parallel lines?
 - b. What are the major parts/chunks?
- 4) Label any sets of lines that you can with the type of parallelism they use.
- 5) Label any images you find. What might be the intended effect on the audience? How does the imagery of the psalm (i.e., what pictures the words are painting) reinforce/color the point being made? In other words, how does the image bring the point to life?
- 6) Does the psalm include any "double meanings" or a "play on words"? If so, what are they?
- 7) Are there any repetitions that highlight key truths? What are they?
- 8) What are the main turning points/shifts in the psalm's imagery or focus? Is there a "climax" in the psalm? Where is it?
- 9) Does the end of the psalm seem intended to leave us with a particular truth ringing in our ears? If so, what is it?
- 10) How do the beginning and/or final lines of the psalm guide our attention to the author's key concerns? ("The psalmist wants his readers to know/feel/be shaped by_____")
- 11) What emotions is the author arousing? What surprises are there?
- 12) Why does the author say "Blessed is he who considers the poor"? How does this fit with what is said about the blessed person in Psalms 1, 2, and 32?
- 13) Try to capture the main point of the psalm in your own words: Who is the blessed person, according to Psalm 41?

- 1) What are similarities and differences between the situation in Psalm 41 (Old Testament Israel) and our day (New Testament church)?
- 2) What images or key words are developed in the New Testament, and how does the New Testament connect these specifically to Jesus?
- 3) Is any part of this psalm quoted or talked about clearly in the New Testament? (Check cross references or use a study Bible.) If so, what does the New Testament say about it?
- 4) What are similarities and/or differences between David as the king of Israel in this psalm and Christ? How does Jesus reflect the character of God we see in this psalm?
- 5) What parts of this psalm foreshadow any of the following...
 - a. Christ's life of obedience and love?
 - b. His suffering and cross?
 - c. His resurrection?
 - d. His exaltation to heaven? His present reign on the throne? His future coming in glory?
- 6) In Matthew 5, Jesus expands significantly on the Psalms' picture of "the blessed person." How does Jesus's "Sermon on the Mount" from that chapter shed light on Psalm 41?
- 7) Is Jesus clearly identified in the New Testament as the fulfillment or embodiment of any of the images, terms, concepts or characters in Psalm 41? In other words, does the New Testament tell us that Jesus is who this psalm is talking about?
- 8) How is Psalm 41 different from what you would expect someone from another religion—a Muslim, for example—to say on these topics?
- 9) Covenantal context: The Old Testament Law required Israelites to be ceremonially clean and offer sacrifices in order to participate in worship at the temple. In other words, to even *sing* about "The blessed one" with God's people required forgiveness and cleansing through sacrifice.
So how does who Jesus is for us and what he's done for us influence how we think about this psalm's teaching? How is blessing connected to keeping and loving God's law? How is it connected to trusting in Jesus? Are these mutually exclusive?
- 10) Try to sum up the meaning and application of this passage with reference to Christ by using the following phrase to get started; include Christ in your summary sentence:
"God wants you to know that...and to respond by..."
Or *"Blessed is the one..."*

Reflect on and then discuss answers to some or all of the following questions:

- 1) Who are “the poor” in our circumstances?
- 2) In what ways should I see myself in this psalm, given that as a Christian I am at the same time:
 - a sinner?
 - a sufferer?
 - a saint (made holy by God and for God)?
- 3) What is most challenging/convicting about this psalm? What important truths about living and persevering as a Christian does it contain?
- 4) What are its clear commands? What are its clear promises?
- 5) Which section most directly relates to something God is calling you to believe or do? To your present challenges? To your present joys?
- 6) How have you seen Psalm 41 to be true? If you haven’t, talk about why you think that is.
- 7) In what ways does this passage lead me to consider who Christ is for me? In what ways does this passage show me who I am in Christ?
- 8) How are the promises of this psalm kept *to* Christ?
- 9) Which promises of this psalm are given to us now, already? Which are not yet fully ours?
- 10) How does the presence/personhood of God matter, according to the psalm?
- 11) In what ways does this passage show me who I am in Christ?
- 12) What promises or pictures does it use to motivate trust and obedience? What promises or pictures does it use to warn of disobedience?
- 13) Is there someone’s example I’m intended to follow? What might that look like in my situation?

14) How does this passage call on me to change the way I live, think, or feel? The way I pray?

What are ways I can pursue this?

15) How might this passage particularly help a Christian who is...

- straying?
- idle?
- fainthearted?
- weak?
- suffering?

(These categories are mostly drawn from 1 Thessalonians 5:14.)

Which is most relevant to you right now?

16) How does this passage inform or direct how I relate to

- God through Jesus?
- my church?
- other believers?
- the world?

17) What are ways my church community should be challenged and/or encouraged through this? How can I/we contribute to making that happen?

18) How does this passage lead me to worship?

18) What worldly counterfeit of what it means to be “blessed” most closely resembles *this* psalm? What’s missing in that counterfeit that the truths of Psalm 41 provide? In other words, what’s the world’s ‘fake’ version of the blessedness this psalm presents, and what is that fake version missing?

19) How does this correct or shed light on my view of what it means to be “blessed”?

19) Sum up the application of this passage using the blank to identify those whom the passage most directly addresses. Build on your answer to question 10 from the previous section.

*“God wants those who _____ to know that... **and to respond by...**”
or “I am blessed, because...”*

Pray.

- 1) Write four summary lines, one for each psalm in this study, using this format:
"Blessed are...for..."
 - a. Psalm 1:
 - b. Psalm 2:
 - c. Psalm 32:
 - d. Psalm 41:

- 2) How does this overview of "the blessed one" highlight Christ...
 - a. as the blessed one (the recipient of God's blessing)?
 - b. as the source of our blessing?

- 3) How does this overview of "the blessed one" compare/contrast with worldly views of what it means to "be blessed"?

- 4) What means of growth will you pursue in response? What truths from these psalms will you rest in and how? What truths from these four psalms must you reorient your life around and how?

- 5) Write your own psalm beginning with "Blessed is the one..."
 - Use parallelism.
 - Include some imagery/examples.
 - Be honest about your emotions.

You might focus on a particular fundamental truth about "the Blessed life" that we saw in these four psalms (God's Word, The Son our Refuge, forgiveness of sin, love for neighbors) or another fundamental aspect or topic related to the Christian life, such as hope, the Spirit, regeneration, prayer, the removal of shame, the hope of resurrection, the means of grace, the church, etc.).

Pray.

APPENDIX: SIMPLIFIED QUESTIONS

(Adapted from *One-to-One Bible Reading*, by David Helm, pp. 90–91)

For each segment of the study, you can use the following questions to guide your personal or group study:

Context:

- Are there any clues about the circumstances in which the passage was written?
- What has happened so far?

Observation:

- Are there repetitions or multiple instances of similar ideas? Do these repetitions make a particular point, or point to the structure of the passage?
- What images or metaphors does the author use? What do they indicate about God or the other people in the text? What might they indicate about modern readers?
- What is the tone of the passage? What emotions is the author arousing?
- What surprises are there?

Meaning:

- Are there specific instructions/commands given to the reader? Does this passage mention any consequences for not following God's commands?
- How does the author motivate the reader/audience, or make his appeal?
- What does the passage teach us about God, and his people, and life in his world?
- Does the passage point forward to Jesus? Is the gospel anticipated or foreshadowed in some way?

Application:

- How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding about who God is and what he is like? How does it challenge (or confirm) your understanding in other ways?
- How does this passage point you to Jesus's sufficiency for you? How does it point to his authority over you?
- Is there some attitude you need to change? What is it? What would change look like?
- How does this passage call on you to change the way you live?

