

Psalm 46. A hymn of joy.

Unprecedented circumstances and threats to our existence drive us to our knees and back to the question of Who is God? Psalm 46 was born out of such a time.

For Starters:

Who in your life (past or present) could you describe as your “Refuge,” your “Strength,” and your “Help”? What’s the difference between these three words?

Psalm 46 seems to flow in a three-part movement. Each movement, in the original Hebrew text, finishes with the word *selah* as if signaling some kind of a pause.

Read Psalm 46.

Answer the following for each movement:

1. How is God described in these verses?
2. What was the problem?
3. What is the appropriate response? Why?

Verses 1-3

Verses 4-7

Verses 8-11

Read Romans 8:31-39

What does this passage tell us about living in an uncertain time as the people of God? Think about all the reasons you identified for Jerusalem and in Romans 8 not to be afraid. How can we live these truths out in our day-to-day life?

Psalm 23

Read Psalm 23.

Read the anti-Psalm 23.

I'm on my own.
No one looks out for me or protects me.
I experience a continual sense of need.
Nothing's quite right.
I'm always restless.
I'm easily frustrated and often disappointed.
It's a jungle — I feel overwhelmed.
It's a desert — I'm thirsty.
My soul feels broken, twisted, and stuck.
I can't fix myself.
I stumble down some dark paths.
Still, I insist: I want to do what I want, when I want, how I want.
But life's confusing.
Why don't things ever really work out?
I'm haunted by emptiness and futility — shadows of death.
I fear the big hurt and final loss.
Death is waiting for me at the end of every road,
but I'd rather not think about that.
I spend my life protecting myself.
Bad things can happen.
I find no lasting comfort.
I'm alone . . . facing everything that could hurt me.
Are my friends really friends?
Other people use me for their own ends.
I can't really trust anyone.
No one has my back.
No one is really for me — except me.
And I'm so much all about ME, sometimes it's sickening.
I belong to no one except myself.
My cup is never quite full enough.
I'm left empty.
Disappointment follows me all the days of my life.
Will I just be obliterated into nothingness?
Will I be alone forever, homeless, free-falling into void?
Sartre said, "Hell is other people."
I have to add, "Hell is also myself."
It's a living death,
and then I die. (David Powlison)

What are your reflections on the difference between the real Psalm 23 and its 'photographic negative'?

1. Read some or all of following verses¹. What would you say is the difference in meaning between the phrases “God is a shepherd” and “the LORD is my shepherd”? What does that communicate to you about your relationship with God?
 - Genesis 49:24
 - Psalm 77:20; 78:52, 70-72; 79:13; 80:1
 - Isaiah 40:11
 - Micah 7:14
 - John 10:11
 - Hebrews 13:20

2. Sheep require certain conditions for peace, comfort and provision. What is significant about God’s actions and provision in verses 2 and 3?

3. Verse 4 highlights the reality that even though God is our shepherd, we will still face dangers and hardship. What is the source of hope for the psalmist in the midst of hardship?

4. To be in the presence of enemies usually means to be fear-filled and hasty, but verse 5 offers a quite different situation. What does this verse tell us about God’s presence and power as our friend in the face of enemies?

5. "Goodness and mercy" is God's prevailing tendency. It is the dominant inclination of his heart, the very love and passion of His soul. This becomes clear in verse 6. An interesting thing about the word "follow" is that it signifies a very active kind of following. It means “active pursuit”. It could just as easily be translated: "Surely goodness and mercy shall **pursue me** all the days of my life." What hope do these words bring you about your daily life and eternal life?

6. How does the finished work of Christ (His life, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, His rule in heaven, His gift of the Holy Spirit) bring the realities of Psalm 23 to us, present and active, today?

For homework:

Try sitting quietly for 2 minutes. Read Psalm 23 in your own head, or better yet, write out Psalm 23. Where says ‘I’, ‘me’ or ‘my’, replace that with your name. What are your reflections on doing this?

¹ Some of these questions are edited version of the studies found on <https://mwerickson.com/2014/07/22/living-the-good-life-discussion-questions/>

Psalm 27. A Psalm of Confidence²

For starters

How would you define hope?

1. Fill in the blank about something fun/funny/casual going on in your life:

I hope:

(example: the Bombers win the AFL Premiership soon)

2. Fill in the blank about something more serious going on in your life.

I hope:

(example: they can figure out what's wrong with my Dad)

Read Psalm 27:1-6

Q. God always gives us tangible reasons not to fear. What reasons are given in verse 1?

- The Lord is my light
David is picturing a relationship with God that gives him light...
 - light to see his own shortcomings and sin
 - light to have direction for the future
 - light that made his way plain

² Edited and expanded by Steve Nation from https://www.faithlafayette.org/resources/lessons/psalms_27

- The Lord is my salvation
He is present. He is enough.
- The Lord is my stronghold or strength word "strength" or "defence".
I am protected

Q. Why do you think David speaks verses 2-3 to himself?

The point is - David had a "track record" - he had put the truth of God's word to the test in his own experience as he sought to trust God and live for Him as a result--he could face the future with great confidence

Q. Can you talk about how God has done something similar for you in the past? Can you think about/talk about the future with the same kind of confidence?

Q. In verse 4, David gives us some indication of what has sustained this kind of confidence. Obviously, there were other things David desired and other things he sought after. But in terms of priorities, what were His big ones? Why are these important?

Q. David concludes this first section in verse 6. What is he emphasizing here?

- 1) the victory that God is going to give him
- 2) the praise he is going to give God.

The kind of relationship that David describes in verses 1-6 leads naturally to the kind of prayer we read about in verse 7-13.

Read verses 7-13.

What is David concerned about in verses 7-13?

- that God will hear him - vs. 7-8
- that God will not be angry with him - vs. 9
- being forsaken by parents - v. 10
- being delivered to his enemies - v. 12
- false criticism - v. 12

Q. Even though the list of problems/concerns we just mentioned are substantial, David still had confidence. How do verses 7-13 give us some indication as to why:

- The Lord will never forsake him. - verse 10
- Focused on God's goodness - verse 13
- Waited on the Lord - verse 14

Q. Do you have the kind of relationship with God where you view Him as your light, salvation and protection? How could you grow in this?

Psalm 1

What or who are the biggest influences in your life? How and why?

Read Psalm 1.

Verses 1-2 introduce us to two contrasting ways to live. What are they?

If you were to watch a video of your last week, what path would you say that you are actively living on?

What are the outcomes of the two ways to live?

Verses 3-4

Verses 5-6

Do these verses reflect your life at the moment? Why or why not?

Read Ephesians 4:17-21. What do these verses tell us about the following?

How we are not to live

How we are to live

Why?

What will it look like for you to live the blessed life this coming week?

Psalm 73

How has God shown His goodness to us in Jesus Christ? List as many examples as you can?

Read Psalm 73

Verse 1 is a statement of faith by Asaph. In what ways did God show His goodness to Israel (reflect on Israel's history)?

What is Asaph wrestling with in verses 2-14? What emotions, experiences and thoughts are expressed?

A sudden change happens in verses 15-20. What is it? How and why?

How does Asaph change as a result? (vv.21-28)

What parts of Psalm 73 do you most connect with today?

Read the following passages in the Letter to the Hebrews. What do they speak about our privileges, and how we (and others we care for) can experience something like what Asaph did?

Hebrews 10:19-25

Hebrews 13:5-6