



Rooted

IN HIS WORD



March

IDENTITY



Rooted In His Word: Identity

Nehemiah 1 - Nehemiah

March 7, 2021

FOR THE LEADER

Today, we are going to look at compassion as part of our identity in Jesus. There is extra background material at the end of this lesson that helps set up the historical and geographical setting for Nehemiah. We will see the process that godly compassion takes in the life of Nehemiah.

MAIN GOAL: When our hearts break for the things that break God's heart, it leads us to spiritual and physical action.

TODAY'S TRUTHS:

TRUTH #1: True compassion starts when our hearts break for the things that break God's heart.

TRUTH #2: True compassion leads to spiritual action.

TRUTH #3: True compassion leads to physical action.

We cannot have godly compassion and be disobedient to God's call to act on it without falling into the sin of disobedience.

I. INTRODUCTION

What do you think about when you hear the phrase, "broken heart"?

We all have a first impression of the phrase "broken heart" but today we are going to look at that more closely in the life of Nehemiah. Nehemiah was a man of God in the diaspora of the Jews, meaning he was displaced from the physical nation of Israel because of the Exile by the Babylonians. Then the Persian Empire defeated the Babylonians and began their reign over Israel and most of the known world. The Persian Emperor was much more lenient on the exiled peoples and began to allow them to return to their hometowns. It was during this time that we find Nehemiah. He is the cupbearer for the emperor, and this is where we pick up our story for today.

Nehemiah had a broken heart. His heart was broken for his people and his nation. They were God's chosen people and the Temple was the center of worship for the nation. The Temple was in Jerusalem and it was the place where the Jews met God's Presence to worship Him and it was the place where sacrifices were made to atone for the peoples' sins. It was paramount in the Jewish faith. We, as Christians, don't feel quite the connection with a place of worship as the Jews do. Yes, our churches are of a prime importance to us, but for the Jews it was as special to them as our quiet time of meeting with God individually. It was the place where they experienced God's Presence.

Their atonement of sin happened in the Temple. We, as Christians, have our sin atoned for through the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus. Ezra rebuilt the Temple a little more than a decade before this passage in Nehemiah, but the Temple and Jerusalem were still under attack by raiders as well as many other social issues caused by the Exile. There was no security for their place of worship and some scholars argue that the Temple rebuild wasn't complete until the walls were rebuilt.

II. GET FOCUSED

Read Nehemiah 1:1-11

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.

Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, ²that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. ³And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire."

⁴As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. ⁵And I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, ⁶let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. ⁷We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. ⁸Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, ⁹but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.' ¹⁰They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. ¹¹O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."

Now I was cupbearer to the king.

TRUTH #1: TRUE COMPASSION STARTS WHEN OUR HEARTS BREAK FOR THE THINGS THAT BREAK GOD'S HEART.

What did Nehemiah's heart break for in 1:1-3?

What are some of the things that break your heart? How do you handle it when your heart is broken?

We see how Nehemiah's heart broke for the people of Israel and for the walls and gates that were destroyed. The brokenness of the walls and gates is symbolic of the broken relationship between man and God. This breaks God's heart. This is not about preferences in worship, it is about having a close relationship with God. That's what God wants for His people. This broke God's heart. This was an incredibly hard time for the nation of Israel because they had disobeyed God and were being ruled by nations that weren't godly. They should have been ruled by God who was pointing them to Himself. But their sin had caused God to send them into exile so that their hearts could be broken and return to Him.

Nehemiah's heart breaking for the walls and gates was not just about the appearance of the city or Temple. His heart being broken for the walls and the gates wasn't just about protective structures, it went deeper into his heart for the worship of God. Without the walls and gates, the Jews couldn't focus their worship on God completely. The walls and gates being broken down created a lack of security for the people of God and opened them to attack from the raiders that plagued them. That outer court just inside the wall was the court of the Gentiles where the non-Jews could come and worship. So, Nehemiah's heart to rebuild the walls and gates was about the chief purpose of mankind, worshiping God. Nehemiah felt this burden of compelling compassion deep down inside his heart and was breaking for the things that broke God's heart. This compulsion of sympathy pushed Nehemiah to the next step of compassion.

YOUR VIEWPOINT

TRUTH #2: TRUE COMPASSION LEADS TO SPIRITUAL ACTION.

Read Nehemiah 1:4-11

As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. ⁵And I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, ⁶let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. ⁷We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. ⁸Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, ⁹but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.'

¹⁰They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. ¹¹O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."

How did Nehemiah respond spiritually to his heart breaking for the people and the broken walls and gates?

Nehemiah's heartbreak led him to mourn, pray and fast. His heart was broken but he didn't wallow in grief or succumb to the massive weight of his heartache. He turned to prayer and fasting in his mourning for God to carry the weight of his grief. He knew he couldn't handle this weight alone and because he had a close relationship with God, he cried out to Him. The passage says that he was already fasting and continued in it as he poured his heart out to God in prayer. Nehemiah was already actively seeking God and involved in spiritual disciplines in his walk with God. His first action was spiritual action. He mourned, fasted, and prayed. He didn't rush to try and fix it. He sought the Lord. In these verses, Nehemiah's prayer is recorded. There are several elements of his prayer that are important, and we use them today.

What's your go-to spiritual action when God breaks your heart for something? How do you react to heartache?

We see that Nehemiah mourns, prays, and fasts. We don't always have the same reaction to the heartbreak that we experience but we are all in process in our faith. God wants to teach us something today about how we react to heartbreak, stressful situations, anxiety, the brokenness of our hearts, etc. So, let's look deeper into Nehemiah's prayer.

THE COMPONENTS OF NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER (1:5-11):

Nehemiah's heart broke and he turned to God in mourning, prayer and fasting. He didn't go talk to his friends and complain. He didn't turn to social media to vent. He didn't rationalize away his feelings or sweep them under a rug. He turned to God. He poured his heart out in mourning, prayer, and fasting.

We can learn from the prayers of those in the Scriptures. We have all seen or heard of patterns for prayer in scripture that we use in our prayer lives (ACTS=Adore, Confess, Thanksgiving, Supplication; The Lord's Prayer; Praying Scripture back to God). As we study the prayers recorded in scripture, it's important to look for major themes because there is no special recipe for prayer. Another thing we learn is that prayer is a conversation with the God of the universe, and we should approach Him in this way. But God wants us to have a relationship with Him not just a formal appeal to a king. So, let's learn from Nehemiah's prayer.

What does Nehemiah pray specifically?

What are some of the major components that we see in Nehemiah's prayer that we use in our prayer life even now?

Adoration

- He praised God (1:5)
- He stood on God's covenant with his people and asked God to hear his prayer based on God's covenant (1:5-6a)

Confession

- He confessed Corporate Sin (1:6b & 7)
- He confessed Personal Sin (1:6c & 7)
- He stood on God's promise to His people to return them to the Promised Land when they returned their hearts to Him (1:8-9)

Supplication

- He asks God to hear his prayers, give him success, and grant him mercy in the sight of the Emperor (1:11)

Why are adoration, confession, and supplication (or any other components mentioned) important for our prayer lives?

Whose accomplishments are the foundation of his prayer?

As we look at these components, we see the foundation of Nehemiah's prayer. He takes a stand in prayer, but He doesn't stand on his own accomplishments or his own desires. He stands on the covenant and promises of God.

How does Nehemiah's prayer show compassion?

How does Nehemiah's compassionate prayer challenge you in your prayer life?

YOUR VIEWPOINT

This last verse of Nehemiah's prayer (1:11) leads us to our third truth for today...

TRUTH #3: TRUE COMPASSION LEADS TO PHYSICAL ACTION.

Read Nehemiah 1:11

O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."

What did Nehemiah ask God to do in verse 11?

We see here, in this last verse, where Nehemiah asks God to give him success and mercy with the Emperor so that he can call God's people home and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. His compassion for his broken people and hindered worship of God led him to act for God's glory. He didn't squelch the compassion that God burdened him with. His physical action flowed from his spiritual action.

This wasn't an easy thing for Nehemiah to do. It was a dangerous thing to approach the Emperor with a request like this that could be viewed as an attack on the emperor's reign over the empire. Nehemiah, as a cupbearer, was close to the Emperor but that relationship would not necessarily save him from the wrath of the Emperor. We need to understand that following God leads us to do hard things, by faith.

How do you think Nehemiah felt when, after this passage, he went to talk to the Emperor? What do you think were his insecurities? What do you think his confidence was like?

What do you think was a bigger dilemma for Nehemiah: following God and approaching the Emperor or not following God and doing nothing? Why?

YOUR VIEWPOINT

III. CONCLUSION

It's good to see how God moves in the lives of men and women in the Bible. It should encourage us and empower us in our lives. We've seen how Nehemiah's heart broke for the things that broke God's heart; how he turned to God in spiritual action (prayer and fasting); how his compassion led him to physical action and to be part of the solution.

God uses men and women to do His work/will. God doesn't call us to fix every problem in the world, but He does give us compassion for certain things because His will is to use us to be part of the solution. Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 12, that we are all part of the Body of Christ and that we have a role to play in that Body. We aren't called to play every role in the body of Christ. He has created us to be a part of the Body. The role (no matter how big or small) we are created to fulfill plays a huge role in the completion of God's plan.

Has there been a time when God has broken your heart for something and led you to act on your compassion?

What is God breaking your heart for now?

How is God calling you to act spiritually and physically to be part of the solution for His glory this week?

IV. EXTRA TIME

What is one thing that you want to see change in our world?

BACKGROUND of NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah is the sequel to Ezra. Ezra was the man God used during the Babylonian Exile to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. Now we pick up with Nehemiah about 13 years (Ezra 7:8 & Nehemiah 1:1) after Ezra arrived in Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple. Nehemiah and Ezra are books that have an unknown author but both books use a direct source from the two men because large portions of the books are written in the first-person point of view. It is thought that the author of 1 & 2 Chronicles is also the author of Ezra and Nehemiah. Below is a Chronological Chart of the two books.

Chronology of Ezra-Nehemiah

Ezra 1-6	537-515 B.C.
Ezra 7-Nehemiah 13	458-433 B.C.

Nehemiah is the main character in this self-titled book. He is presented as a great visionary, leader, and even a hero to the Jewish people. It is in this time frame that Jews were first called Jews. This book's setting is in 445 BC when Nehemiah went to live in Jerusalem to rebuild the walls and gates of the city. Nehemiah's family were one of the Jewish people who were displaced in the Babylonian Exile, 597 BC for the first, with others dated at 587/586 BC, and 582/581 BC. At the beginning of the story, as mentioned in verse 1, Nehemiah was in Susa which was the summer home of the Emperor Artaxerxes. The Emperor's summer home was in Ecbatana, north of Susa (see the picture). Nehemiah was a long way from Jerusalem. You can also see the timeline for Nehemiah reflected in the chart below to better understand the time frame of this book.



Chronology of Nehemiah

Event	Month/Day	Year	Reference
Hanani brings Nehemiah a report from Jerusalem (20th year of Artaxerxes I)		445-444 B.C.	1:1
Nehemiah before King Artaxerxes	1	445	2:1
Nehemiah arrives to inspect Jerusalem walls		445	2:11
Wall is finished	6/25	445	6:15
People of Israel gather	7	445	7:73-8:1
People of Israel celebrate Feast of Booths	7/15-22	445	8:14
People of Israel fast and confess sins	7/24	445	9:1
Nehemiah returns to Susa (32nd year of Artaxerxes I)		433-432	5:14; 13:6

V. PRAYER

Pray for the things that break the hearts of those in your group today.
Pray that God would use you to be a part of the solution.

VI. MEMORY VERSE

Psalm 23

NOTES

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Rooted In His Word: Identity

Psalm 23 – “The Lord is My Shepherd”

March 14, 2021

FOR THE LEADER

The Psalms are written as poetry and were songs that were sung in worship by the Israelites. Psalm 23 is one of the most well-known passages of scripture in the world. Even those who have never been to church recognize it from movies, books, etc. With this familiarity, it's easy to fall into “knowing” what it is about because you've experienced the comfort that comes from this Psalm in a tough time. But this Psalm speaks to things much deeper than comfort. We will look at this Psalm verse by verse and phrase by phrase in order to unlock the secrets in it. So, as we get into the Psalm, we will look at it a little differently because of the genre and structure of the text. As we walk through the Psalm today, we will point out major truths that impact our identity as believers in our faith journey.

This Psalm breaks down into two main sections where we see the Lord as Shepherd (Ps. 23:1-4) and the Lord as Host (Ps. 23:5-6). These are two functions that the Lord takes on in the eyes of the Psalmist but His character shines through even as His function changes. Both functions of the Lord show how they impact the life of the Psalmist, which is also expressed in the life of every follower of God.

Be mindful to look at the verbs in the text to see what actions the Shepherd does and what actions the Psalmist takes.

MAIN GOAL: We live overflowing lives that impact the world when we trust God fully.

TODAY'S TRUTHS:

TRUTH #1: I can trust God to provide, protect, restore, and lead me.

TRUTH #2: God restores my soul so I can face any circumstance with Him.

TRUTH #3: The Lord is generous and wants to saturate our lives so others experience Him through our overflow.

I. INTRODUCTION

Think of a fast-paced movie where the main character went through many trials but had peace and confidence through it all because he/she was doing the right thing.

What movie and character are you thinking of and why?

Tell us about a time when you felt like you were running ragged, couldn't find rest and life was overwhelming. Why was it overwhelming?

The psalmist is setting forth a vision of what it's like to live a life in close relationship with God and trust Him fully even when facing hard circumstances.

II. GET FOCUSED

TRUTH #1: I CAN TRUST GOD TO PROVIDE, PROTECT, RESTORE, AND LEAD ME.

The opening line sets the tone for the whole Psalm. It tells us who God is and the result that the Psalmist experiences because of who God is.

A. THE LORD AS SHEPHERD (23:1-4)

Read 23:1

The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.

What does it mean that the Lord is my Shepherd?

The word picture of the Shepherd and his sheep is one that was widely understood in their day. Sheep need a shepherd because they can't fend for themselves in the wild. They are very susceptible to predators and are not good at searching and finding new grass to eat and water to drink. They are a herd animal but unlike other herd animals, they need someone to lead them, provide for them, and protect them. Sheep know their Shepherd's voice and would follow him blindly because they trust him so deeply. In John 10:27, Jesus uses this example of His sheep knowing His voice to teach his followers how they can know God's voice. This is the way it was for shepherds. There may be several herds of thousands of sheep that would water at the same well in those days. The shepherds would lead their sheep to the well to drink but didn't worry about the herds mixing together because all he had to do was call his sheep when it was time to leave and his sheep would all follow him back out to pasture.

What does it mean that "I shall not want" because He is my Shepherd?

The Psalmist points out some major things here about God's character and how He takes care of the Psalmist. Let's look at these things in verses 2-4.

Read 23:2a

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

What is significant about His sheep lying down in green pastures?

What do you think this does for the Psalmist?

Green pastures were where Shepherds led their sheep to graze. They were constantly having to move from one patch of green pasture to another as the sheep ate down the grass. It was a place where the sheep could also bed down and rest. This is indicative of God's character to **PROVIDE** for His sheep and **LEAD** His sheep to provision even though they cannot see the next green pasture. *God PROVIDES for our PHYSICAL NEEDS.*

Read 23:2b

He leads me beside still waters.

What is the significance of the Shepherd leading his sheep beside still waters?

What do you think this does for the Psalmist?

Still waters are representative of the peace that God leads us in. Still waters are a great place for sheep to drink their fill without any worry of danger. Fast flowing water was a hazard for sheep because a sheep in full wool would not be able to stand up if it fell because of the weight of the water in its wool. Then the sheep would be in danger of drowning or predators. This, too, is indicative of God's character to **PROVIDE** for His sheep and **LEAD** His sheep to the provision they need. *God PROVIDES for our PHYSICAL NEEDS.*

At first glance, it appears that the Psalmist is speaking primarily of God providing for physical needs, but God isn't just meeting the physical needs of the sheep when He does these things. He is meeting the spiritual needs as well. We see the Psalmist point out this spiritual need met by the Shepherd in verse 3.

Read 23:3a

He restores my soul.

The two verses preceding this verse build into “He restores my soul.” The Shepherd leads His sheep to lay down in green pastures and beside still waters because it meets their physical need. But the Shepherd is also meeting the spiritual needs of the Psalmist by leading Him to a time of peace and quiet where he can focus on God. God is the only one who can restore us, and it is this time with God that restores our souls.

How does God ‘making us lay down in green pastures’ and ‘leading us beside still waters’ restore the Psalmist’s soul?

What would be a modern equivalent to laying down in green pastures and being led beside still waters if you were writing this Psalm? (ie: sitting on the beach while the waves crash against the sand, hiking/camping in the mountains, going to the spa, sitting on your front porch as the sun rises, etc.)

Soul care is something that is being talked about more and more in the church these days. It is something that has been neglected for too long. The picture of how God leads us, here in Psalm 23, is an antithesis to the way most of us live our lives today. So many of us live 100 miles per hour and never let off the gas. We work and play with little margin in life. We go, go, go.

How do you follow God in letting Him care for your soul? Or if this is something new for you, how do you think God wants to lead you in caring for your soul?

What needs to change in your life to allow you the margin needed to have this time with God?

Read 23:3b

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.

What does it mean that 'He leads us in paths of righteousness'?

What is significant about God leading us in these paths of righteousness primarily for His Name's sake?

The Psalmist gets to the reason behind God's provision and soul care that he has just spoken about. It's all to lead him in God's way/path for a much higher reason than the Psalmist's benefit. It is ultimately for God's name's sake. God provides what we need physically and spiritually so that we can follow Him and bring Him glory in all we do as we trust Him.

How have you seen God provide physically and spiritually for you?

YOUR VIEWPOINT

TRUTH #2: GOD RESTORES MY SOUL SO THAT I CAN FACE ANY CIRCUMSTANCE WITH HIM.

Read 23:4

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

God as Shepherd continues through this hypothetical example of the valley of the shadow of death. The Psalmist is building upon each line consecutively. The Lord provides for us and restores our soul so that we can walk in God's path for our life and so that we can make it through any circumstance with Him. The valley of the shadow of death is a word picture of the darkest circumstance possible. It is a symbolic place for times in life where it is so dark that it seems like there is no way out, where it seems as though we may die. Look at the amount of anxiety, depression, and suicide we face in our culture. These are the type of times the Psalmist is referencing here.

It's important to notice that the Psalmist doesn't blame the Shepherd for going through the valley of the shadow of death. The Psalmist accepts that there are all kinds of things that he will face, and he is confident in these times because the Lord is his Provider and has Restored his soul to be able to face whatever comes his way. The truth that God is with him comforts him no matter the circumstance. All the Psalmist's confidence is in the Lord.

The rod of the shepherd was for fighting off predators. The staff was for guiding the sheep and helping the sheep get out of any kind of predicament they might get into. We all have experienced times like these. Some hard times are darker and harder than others, but there is a promise here that we find comfort in Him no matter how dark the darkness is that we are walking through. He is always with us.

Tell us about a time when you felt like you were walking through the valley of the shadow of death and how you felt during that time.

How does God's restoration of your soul help you walk through dark valleys?

How does the truth that 'God is with us at all times,' even dark ones, help us trust Him even more?

On a scale from 1-10 (never to always), how well do you trust Him and find comfort in Him when you walk through dark times?

What do you need to do to grow in your trust of God, to find the provision, protection, guidance, and comfort that you need in Him?

YOUR VIEWPOINT

B. THE LORD AS HOST (23:5-6)

The Lord is pictured as hosting the Psalmist at a feast in these last verses. And like the previous section, there is an element of God's character and how it influences the physical and spiritual life of the Psalmist (Ps. 23:5).

TRUTH #3: THE LORD IS GENEROUS AND WANTS TO SATURATE OUR LIVES SO OTHERS EXPERIENCE HIM THROUGH OUR OVERFLOW.

Read 23:5a

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

This verse brings the element of the Lord preparing a feast for the Psalmist. For the Israelite, this feast brings implications from the Exodus when God provided the manna and quail as well as water in the desert for the Israelites. The kicker here is that He does this even in the presence of His enemies. The Lord makes a feast for His followers and brings peace even in hostility. God can bring peace in any circumstance. And the more futuristic tone here alludes to the feast the Lord is preparing for us in eternity with Him (Revelation 19:9).

What do you think this feast represents in the life of the Psalmist and in our lives?

What hope does it bring knowing that God is preparing a place for us?

Read 23:5b

You anoint my head with oil;

This verse brings in a new element of anointing, of God pouring oil on his head. In Old Testament times the anointing of someone's head was used, like with David, to proclaim them as king. But it wasn't just a proclamation of kingship, it was a representation of God pouring His Spirit out on that person to have the godly gifting needed to lead His people or accomplish a task. God didn't pour His Spirit out on all followers in the Old Testament, but He does in the New Testament. In Acts 1:8 Jesus promises the Holy Spirit for all followers of Him. This anointing represents the blessing of God with the Presence of God.

What does the Holy Spirit bring to your life?

What spiritual gifts has the Holy Spirit given you and how do you use them?

How is the Presence of the Holy Spirit a blessing in your life?

Read 23:5c

My cup overflows.

The promise of God preparing the feast for His followers and the pouring out of His Spirit on him leads him to express his joy in the phrase "my cup overflows." God is generous and provides for us, leads us, restores our soul, protects us through every circumstance, prepares a feast for us with Him, and pours out His Spirit on us; all of which brings incredible joy. As we spend time with God and trust Him, His joy spills out of our lives so that others experience it too. This is God's plan for believers. He wants to overflow from our lives in such a way that we bring life and encouragement to others through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is what Jesus means when He says we are to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16) in this world.

Tell us about a time in your life when you have experienced this kind of joy.

How does time with God and the moving of the Holy Spirit overflow out of your life?

Think about the people in your life. Which ones bring you life? Which ones bring you down? What's the difference in those people?

Read 23:6

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

What do you think it means for goodness and mercy to follow us all the days of our lives?

The Psalmist declares that goodness and mercy shall follow him and that he will dwell in the house of the Lord. This is the benefit that comes from a relationship with God. It also feels like the Psalmist may be saying that because of the goodness and mercy of the Lord, he never wants to leave the Lord's Presence. He has such a relationship with the Lord that he never wants to lose it... he wants to dwell with the Lord forever. He's gotten a taste of God's Presence and he never wants to go back to the way it was before.

Have you ever experienced a time in your life when the goodness and the mercy of God were evident? What was it like? How did you feel?

What stands in the way of you living with the Lord in this way every day?

YOUR VIEWPOINT

III. CONCLUSION

MAIN GOAL: We live overflowing lives that impact the world when we trust God fully.

The Psalmist has set forth a vision of what it's like to have a deep relationship with the Lord; to be led by Him; to be restored by Him; to be protected by Him; to be provided for by Him. This life with God isn't ethereal and unattainable. It is what God wants for each and every believer. This is the normal Christian life that God wants for us; just like in Genesis when God walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the evening.

What would it look like for you to live in this kind of relationship with God?

What needs to change in your life to be this close to God?

How do you need to allow the Holy Spirit to lead you and overflow from you to bring life and encouragement to others?

IV. EXTRA TIME

Why do you think Psalm 23 is read at funerals?

Is Psalm 23 meant to bring hope and life or is it meant to bring thoughts of death and despair?

V. PRAYER

Pray for the Holy Spirit to lead you in times of Restoration.
Pray for each of you to take the steps needed to draw closer to God.

VI. MEMORY VERSE

Psalm 23

Rooted In His Word: Identity

Psalm 90 - You Only Live Once

March 21, 2021

FOR THE LEADER

Psalms, in the Hebrew, is actually called Tehillim meaning "Praises" or "Songs of Joy." It is generally accepted that the overall theme of the Psalms is joy. But when you look at the sheer number of Psalms, lament psalms outnumber the hymn (joyful) psalms. But by volume and placement of hymns of joy at the end of the Psalms, the reader is left with the overall sense of joy when working through Psalms in its entirety. A number of things can be deduced from this overall structure but the most obvious is that in this life we will experience pain, we will experience highs and lows, but through it all joy is found in the Lord.

The Psalms are divided into five divisions or books (1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, 107-150). Each of the 5 books concludes with a doxology as a way of ending that movement in the book. These divisions/books are meant to mimic that of the Pentateuch/Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy).

BACKGROUND

Psalm 90 is a psalm about God's good and creative nature, His authority over mankind, His wrath on sin, our response to His wrath, a prayer for His mercy, and a cumulative request for God's favor to be upon His people and their work. The main theme of Psalm 90 appears to be a request for God to help His people learn to 'number their days' so they can live a fully devoted life to Him and His glory.

MAIN GOAL: To follow God to the fullest every day because His presence satisfies me and causes my actions to make an eternal impact.

TODAY'S TRUTHS:

TRUTH #1: In God's eternal nature and creative power we find our eternal refuge.

TRUTH #2: We find comfort in God's supreme authority over mankind and time because He is in control.

TRUTH #3: God's wrath on sin holds us accountable and emphasizes the grace we have in Jesus.

TRUTH #4: We should respond to God's power and wrath by repenting.

TRUTH #5: We find true joy in God's presence even during trials.

TRUTH #6: Revelation of God at work leads to His favor on our lives and to our actions making an eternal impact because of His presence.

I. INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been overwhelmed at the amazing size or sight of something? (Maybe it was a skyscraper in New York City, the snow-covered peaks of the Rocky Mountains, the Grand Canyon, Iguazu Falls in Argentina, a sunrise over the Atlantic Ocean, or maybe the Redwood and Sequoia trees on the west coast.)

What was it about that thing that put you in a state of awe? How did you feel?

Psalm 90 is about God's dominion over creation, life and death, sin, and our response to Him. The Psalmist is in awe of God's power and authority. God was, is and always will be the refuge and safe place for those who follow Him. As we get focused on Psalm 90, we will break it down into six sections to help discuss the passage.

II. GET FOCUSED

Read Psalm 90 (you may want to divide it into a few sections for others to read)

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. ²Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. ³You return man to dust and say, "Return, O children of man!" ⁴For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night. ⁵You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning: ⁶in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers. ⁷For we are brought to an end by your anger; by your wrath we are dismayed. ⁸You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. ⁹For all our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh. ¹⁰The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. ¹¹Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you? ¹²So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. ¹³Return, O LORD! How long? Have pity on your servants! ¹⁴Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. ¹⁵Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil. ¹⁶Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. ¹⁷Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!

Section 1: Psalm 90:1-2

TRUTH #1: IN GOD'S ETERNAL NATURE AND CREATIVE POWER WE FIND OUR ETERNAL REFUGE.

What does it mean that the Lord has been their dwelling place in all generations?

The phrase "dwelling place" also means refuge or stronghold. It means that He is a place that we can find refreshing protection and sustenance. He is a safe place when all around us there is chaos. And the psalmist points out that He is "our dwelling place in all generations." His compassionate protection and sustenance know no time frame...it is for all generations.

In verse two we see the element of God's creative nature when He created the world and "brought forth" the mountains. There is an element of God 'giving birth' to all of creation. We know that He created out of nothing (ex nihilo) in Genesis 1. That is true creative power. We do not create out of nothing. We use what's been given to us by God and make new things, but we cannot create something from nothing. He is unlike us...holy, set apart. And at the end of verse two we see the statement: "you are God."

How does God's nature help you run to Him as your dwelling place/refuge?

What does it look like for you to retreat to Him as your dwelling place/refuge?

YOUR VIEWPOINT

Section 2: Psalm 90:3-6

TRUTH #2: WE FIND COMFORT IN GOD'S SUPREME AUTHORITY OVER MANKIND AND TIME BECAUSE HE IS IN CONTROL.

God is not bound by time and space. God is eternal. He has always existed and will continue to exist; He knows no beginning or end. He created time and space for us. He created them so that we could live purposefully and keep our focus on Him. Time is one of our greatest resources. It is one of the resources that we can never get back once we've used it. It is a gift to us. We do not control the length of time that we live. God gives us that gift of years. The power of God over our lives and time should cause us to be in a state of awe at His greatness.

What do these verses say about mankind?

What do these verses say about God's dominion over time ("years")?

How does God's supreme authority over our lives and time make you feel?

YOUR VIEWPOINT

Section 3: Psalm 90:7-10

TRUTH #3: GOD'S WRATH ON SIN HOLDS US ACCOUNTABLE AND EMPHASIZES THE GRACE I HAVE IN JESUS.

The psalmist's viewpoint here isn't unique. Look at Psalm 139:7-12

⁷Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? ⁸If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! ⁹If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, ¹⁰even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. ¹¹If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," ¹²even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.

There is no sin that will go unpunished. All sin must eventually be dealt with and held accountable. That is why we need Jesus. He takes the punishment of our sin when we believe in Him and we get the gift of forgiveness. We cannot hide sin from God. And verse 9 and 10 point out how quickly our years come and go. We have but a short time on the earth. The tone is building to the turning point in verses 11-12 but first let's look at sin.

What does the psalmist say about God's wrath on sin?

Read Romans 3:23 and Romans 6:23

3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What does Paul say about sin and the result of sin in our lives?

Who does the work in overcoming our sin?

What does the psalmist say about the brevity of our days and what do you think the psalmist felt when writing these verses?

How does coming to grips with the finiteness and turmoil of our lives make you feel?

YOUR VIEWPOINT

Section 4: Psalm 90:11-12

This is the turning point of this Psalm. This is the point at which the psalmist transitions from talking about our finiteness and God's power and turns to how we respond to His greatness.

TRUTH #4: I SHOULD RESPOND TO GOD'S POWER AND WRATH BY REPENTING.

In these verses we see the importance of taking a real look at the power of God's anger towards sin. It is something that we don't like to think about. We want to think about God's love towards us and His relentless pursuit of our hearts. But there is an element of His character that is relentless in eradicating sin. This truth should cause us to turn to Him for forgiveness and repentance because He is the only One who can give mercy and grace for the sins committed against Him. Paul, in Romans 2:4, says, "Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" The fact that God doesn't pour His wrath out on us for our sin proves His love for us by giving us the time needed to come to faith in Jesus so that we can have forgiveness. This kindness should lead us to repentance. That is where Jesus enters for us. God loves us and wants all people to come to know Him.

How would you explain the power of God's anger towards sin?

In verse 12 the psalmist implores God to "teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom."

What does it mean to 'number our days'?

How do we 'get a heart of wisdom' by numbering our days?

YOUR VIEWPOINT

Section 5: Psalm 90:13-15

TRUTH #5: I FIND TRUE JOY IN GOD'S PRESENCE EVEN DURING TRIALS.

The psalmist begins to implore God to forgive, to satisfy them with His presence, and to make them 'glad' (full of joy) even in trials. When we number our days and live in light of that, we have an urgency to press into His presence constantly. One of the greatest downfalls to our 'devotional life' is the lack of urgency. We fall into the temptation that other things are urgent and important, and we lose sight of our greatest goal on earth: to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. This pattern of seeking forgiveness, finding satisfaction in Him, and, therefore, finding joy during trials is one that should be repeated over and over in our lives. We live with urgency when we know our days are limited and we shouldn't delay in seeking forgiveness, finding satisfaction in Him and finding joy during trials because His presence is with us.

How does this pattern play out in your life?

Have you noticed that when your devotional life struggles you aren't living out this pattern of seeking Him? How has it played out in your life?

YOUR VIEWPOINT

Section 6: Psalm 90:16- 17

TRUTH #6: REVELATION OF GOD AT WORK LEADS TO HIS FAVOR ON MY LIFE AND TO MY ACTIONS MAKING AN ETERNAL IMPACT BECAUSE OF HIS PRESENCE.

It's when we live in the pattern of seeking forgiveness, finding satisfaction in Him and finding joy during trials that we see God at work in and around our lives. We see circumstances the way God sees them. We see the trials as an opportunity to grow and transform our lives. When we have this perspective the favor of God is on us, and the actions we take to build His Kingdom make an eternal impact.

Think about a time in your life when you realized you were not close to God and that your actions weren't making an eternal impact.

Think about a time in your life when you were close to God and you felt His presence and favor on everything you did.

How does the contrast between these two experiences push you into His presence and cause you to desire His favor?

YOUR VIEWPOINT

III. CONCLUSION

Through our study of Psalm 90 we have seen several realities that lead us to the main truth for today.

MAIN GOAL: I should follow God to the fullest every day because His presence satisfies me and causes my actions to make an eternal impact.

How should we follow God to the fullest every day? What does this look like in your life?

What do you need to seek God for this week so that you can live fully for Him every day? Is there something He's asking you to quit doing? Is there something that He's asking you to start doing?

IV. EXTRA TIME

Read John 15:18-26

"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. ²¹But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. ²²If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³Whoever hates me hates my Father also. ²⁴If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. ²⁵But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.' ²⁶"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

Jesus promises us that the world will hate us because of Him.

How does this make you feel about trials in your life?

Read James 1:2-4

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Do you consider your trials to be a joy? Why or why not?

How do you think God wants you to grow in your perspective?

V. PRAYER

Ask your group if anyone is facing a trial right now and would like prayer to walk with God through it.

Pray for your group to live with their days numbered and focus on what is most important.

VI. MEMORY VERSE

Psalm 90:12

Rooted In His Word: Identity

Psalm 139 - The Lord Knows Me

March 28, 2021

FOR THE LEADER

Psalm 139 is a psalm that covers a wide range of emotions in the Psalmist. The first part (139:1-16) shows us an almost haunting depiction of God and His character that the Psalmist ultimately praises God for. The second part (139:17-24) takes a turn to prayer of supplication in how the Psalmist responds to the truth of His character in the first part. The main truth for today's lesson is that God's compassionate pursuit of our Lives demands a response leading to greater holiness.

MAIN GOAL: God's compassionate pursuit of our lives demands a response leading to greater holiness.

TODAY'S TRUTHS:

TRUTH #1: God knows you fully.

TRUTH #2: God is always with you.

TRUTH #3: God made you with purpose.

TRUTH #4: We should desire God's thoughts.

TRUTH #5: We should seek God's way.

TRUTH #6: We should grow in holiness.

I. INTRODUCTION

Have you ever known someone who knows you as well as you know yourself? (For example, someone who completes your sentences for you, someone who knows what you're going to do before you do it, etc.)

Today's Psalm shows us the intimate relationship the Psalmist has with God. As with the other two Psalms we've studied, it depicts a close, personal, saving relationship with God. This is in stark contrast to the idea that saying a prayer can save us from going to Hell and we can live our lives however we see fit. John 17:3 tells us, "And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." We can know God through faith in Jesus Christ. To know God means that you are also known by God. Jesus even speaks about this kind of saving faith and how we can recognize true believers by the fruit in their lives. Those who follow Him will bear fruit and be known by God.

Read Matthew 7:20-23

Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. ²¹"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²²On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

Read John 14:21

"Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

What do these verses show us about a relationship with God through Jesus?

Our relationship with God is one that is an intimate friendship between us and the God of the universe because of the death and resurrection of Jesus. He is our Savior and King; our Healer and Redeemer; our Prince of Peace and Everlasting Father. That's the sentiment in the Psalm today. It's an outpouring of the Psalmist's heart to the Father who is Omnipotent (All-Powerful), Omniscient (All-Knowing), Omnipresent (Present Everywhere All the Time), and Omnibenevolent (Totally Good). There is a deep relationship between God and the Psalmist.

II. GET FOCUSED

Read Psalm 139:1-16

O LORD, you have searched me and known me! ²You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. ³You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. ⁴Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. ⁵You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. ⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. ⁷Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? ⁸If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! ⁹If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, ¹⁰even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. ¹¹If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," ¹²even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. ¹³For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. ¹⁵My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

Part 1: God's Character (Psalm 139:1-16)

TRUTH #1: GOD KNOWS YOU FULLY.

These verses show us how well God knows us. Here is a list of the phrases from the scripture that point to His depth of knowing us:

- *Searched me and known me*
- *Know when I sit down and when I rise up*
- *Discern my thoughts from afar*
- *Search out my path and my lying down*
- *Acquainted with all my ways*
- *Before a word is on my tongue...you know it altogether*

Part of the beauty in this Psalm is that we get to see the depth of feelings from the Psalmist about who God is.

What do you think the Psalmist was feeling when he wrote these verses?

Verses 5 and 6 show us that the Psalmist feels like God is all around him and that God's hand is on him, shaping and molding him. This knowledge is almost too much for the Psalmist and he is in awe of God's knowledge and favor on himself.

YOUR VIEWPOINT

TRUTH #2: GOD IS ALWAYS WITH YOU.

Psalm 139:7-12

What do these verses show you about the extent to which God pursues your heart constantly?

What do these verses make you feel when you read them?

There are two main feelings about God when you read these verses, and both point to God's compassion for us. The first is comfort and security because there is nowhere that you can go to outrun God's pursuit. This builds security for the believer knowing that no matter what they do they are comforted by God always being with them. The second is similar to the first, but it has a more haunting nuance to it. Think about it like a child who has done something to disobey his father and no matter where he goes, he can't get away from his dad. He can't outrun him, can't hide from him, can't escape him no matter how badly he wants to. It brings a feeling of respectful fear but still a comfort knowing that his father pursues him because of his unconditional love. No matter which of these feelings this passage stirs in you, it still leads us to the Father's constant fulfillment of the promise to never leave you or forsake you.

What does having a respectful fear of God look like?

YOUR VIEWPOINT

TRUTH #3: GOD MADE YOU WITH PURPOSE

Psalm 139:11-16

How do these verses show us that God made us with a purpose and for a purpose?

How does knowing that you are made fearfully and wonderfully along with knowing that God has a plan for you life inspire you to live for God?

Have you ever wondered, "Why am I on earth?" You are not just the product of a physical relationship. You are not a mistake. You are not an afterthought. You are not meant to live an empty, lonely life. He created you for more and has a plan for your life that is fulfilling. The intricate way in which God makes each one of us and has a plan for our lives should lead us to worship Him for His goodness.

YOUR VIEWPOINT

Part 2: Our Response to God's Character

Read Psalm 139:17-24

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! ¹⁸If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you. ¹⁹Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me! ²⁰They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain. ²¹Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? ²²I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies. ²³Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

This is where the Psalmist shifts from praising God for being awe-inspiring to his response to God.

TRUTH #4: WE SHOULD DESIRE GOD'S THOUGHTS.

Psalm 139:17-18

What does it mean that God's thoughts are precious to the Psalmist?

The keyword in these verses is "precious." The psalmist believes that God's thoughts are precious to him. Precious is defined by Oxford Languages as, "an adjective describing an object, substance, or resource of great value; not to be wasted or treated carelessly." God's thoughts are so vast that the number of them is incomprehensible because God is Omniscient. Then he says, "I awake, and I am still with you." He is saying that even though God's thoughts and knowledge of himself and everything in the universe is so vast, still God wants the Psalmist to know what He knows; to think what He thinks. The Psalmist is saying God knows him, and He wants to be known by him. God isn't putting you through a game of hide and seek. He isn't trying to make you search for Him by hiding from you. He is here. He is present for you at all times so that you can know Him. Based on the writing, the Psalmist loves this and is constantly seeking to know God's thoughts.

Do you seek God in a way that shows His thoughts are precious to you? Or do you seek His thoughts only when you are in a tight spot and need some direction?

How has God revealed his thoughts to you?

YOUR VIEWPOINT

TRUTH #5: WE SHOULD SEEK GOD'S WAY.

Psalm 139:19-22

This can be mistakenly interpreted as support for believers who want to be separate from the world and from sinners. This isn't the heart of this passage; it should be interpreted as an expression of the Psalmist's hatred of sin and ways of the world that are ungodly because he desires the ways of God so deeply.

What are the things the Psalmist points out that he hates and why?

What is the standard that helps us recognize sin?

What is the difference between hating sin and condoning sin?

How does condoning sin compromise your faith?

This leads us to our final truth from this Psalm. Remember the second part of the Psalm is about your response to God's character. We've seen how the Psalmist seeks God's thoughts because they are precious to him. We've seen how deeply the Psalmist hates sin and sinful ways. Now we will see his desire to grow in personal holiness.

YOUR VIEWPOINT

TRUTH #6: WE SHOULD GROW IN HOLINESS.

Psalm 139:23-24

The Psalmist makes a plea to God to continue to search him and know everything in him that is not in line with God. He ends it with a plea to "lead me in the way everlasting!" This means that he is begging God to lead him to live the God-focused, sin-confessing, sanctifying life now that he will experience with God in heaven. He isn't waiting until he dies and is in the presence of God to make him holy. He is asking God to show him "any grievous way in" him. He is asking God to examine every detail of his life in order to rid his life of any hint of sin.

Why is it important for believers to seek to live holy lives now?

How do you let God examine your heart each day?

YOUR VIEWPOINT

III. CONCLUSION

Now that we've studied this Psalm and have seen the intention and intimacy in the relationship the Psalmist has with the Father...

How does God's compassionate pursuit of you compel you to lead a holy life?

How will you pursue God differently this week?

What is God calling you to change in your life to line up with His holiness?

IV. EXTRA TIME

Go around the class and have each person tell something about themselves that no one else knows about them. (Teacher goes first.) After everyone has a chance to share, encourage them about how great it is for us to serve a God who already knows these things.

Pray for God to search our hearts continuously to expose any hint of sin in us.
Pray that we would be more honest with God and not try to hide things from Him because He already knows everything about us.

VI. MEMORY VERSE

Psalm 139:13-14

NOTES

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

