

# SUMMER 2023 UALC FACILITATOR GUIDE



## SONGS OF SUMMER

ENCOUNTERING GOD IN THE PSALMS

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

Scrolling through the radio is like scrolling through the full range of human emotions. The bravado of a rap song, then the lament of a country crooner. The anger of hard rock and the lounging of a singer-songwriter. Believe it or not, thumbing through the book of Psalms is just like that. The full range of emotions is there, and God wants to meet us in it!

So, this summer we will look at the emotion behind popular songs from the radio, match that emotion with the Psalms from the Bible, and discover that Jesus is the fulfillment of our deepest longings.

In addition to these small group discussions, we encourage your group to join us in our Daily Worship devotions, reflecting on a different passage throughout the week that correlate and texturize the theme of our Sunday passage. You can find our Daily Worship devotions at [ualc.org/dailyworship](http://ualc.org/dailyworship).

## HOW TO USE THE FACILITATOR GUIDE

This is meant to be a resource to help you guide your group through a Bible-based discussion and into your prayer response time. You'll begin with a brief introduction to the topic, followed by a warmup question, often somewhat related to the topic of the study ahead. From there you'll read Scripture together, explore questions in an open conversation (remembering to practice good listening and encourage dialogue), and close with a time of prayer with each other. We end with prayer prompts that may help you tie these passages to the needs or desires of your group, and to bless what the Lord has done in your time together.

There are typically more questions that your group will get through. This is by design. We would rather you have more questions than you need than too few. We advise that the facilitator review the lesson ahead of the meeting and choose a few questions they'd most like to ask, so that you can skip over some questions for the sake of time. Remember, you're meeting routinely, so there will be time to circle back on these conversations again.

Please allot appropriate time for prayer at the end of your meeting. Prayer is an essential and irreplaceable part of small group. We'd rather you abbreviate the discussion and move on to prayer rather than have a long discussion and speed through prayer. That doesn't mean you can't pray efficiently (Mat 6:7), but we believe that God hears and responds to our prayers, and that we are knitted together when we pray with each other.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Dan Kidd at [dkidd@ualc.org](mailto:dkidd@ualc.org).  
For more small group resources, including facilitator training, visit [ualc.org/smallgroups](http://ualc.org/smallgroups)

Special thanks to our authors: Brian Chandler, Becki Bork, Elaine Pierce, Kathy Carr, and Sarah Kidd

# HELLO

## psalm 28

### FACILITATORS:

### WEEK 7

This week we will discuss together Psalm 28. As part of our discussion, we will compare lyrics from Adele's *Hello* to what David expresses in this psalm. You may want to consider playing a portion or all of the song. This guide will prompt you in a portion below to ask a question related to the song and this psalm's theme.

### INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

This week we continue on in our Songs of Summer series, studying the book of Psalms, and looking at how the themes and emotions behind popular songs from the radio match those of the Psalms. We will explore together how Jesus is the fulfillment of our deepest longings.

In the song, "Hello" the artist Adele portrays a familiar and painful experience that most of us have had. She is reaching out to someone for forgiveness, but she is uncertain if they are listening, or interested in reconciling. That same fear shows up in our relationship with God, and we hear it in Psalm 28. But then the Psalmist assures us that, unlike broken relationships in our earthly lives, our Father is always ready to answer our cries for mercy.

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### OPENING QUESTIONS:

- Describe a time when you felt heard – really listened to. What is that feeling like? Why is it so hard to listen?
- What's the best advice you've ever received? Who gave it to you?

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### OPENING PRAYER:

Begin by praying something like this: *Lord, thank you for this time together. Thank you for your word. Help us to set aside all the distractions, all the worries, the fears, we bring into this group, and to spend time learning from you. Thank you for each person here, and for how we support each other. Send your Holy Spirit to teach us, to lead us, to guide us. Amen*

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### SCRIPTURE:

Have someone read Psalm 28 aloud. Thank them for reading.

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## DISCUSSION:

- What is David's main concern in vv. 1-5? Is it personal? Is it a plea for mercy? Is it about his enemies, which impacts his country, his people? Why do you think so?
  - It seems like David is concerned personally – hear my cry for mercy – but he is also angry/upset with 'the wicked.' Perhaps it is both.
- How does David describe God's plan in this psalm?
  - The Lord is trustworthy. He is a 'fortress of salvation.'
  - God is the people's shepherd.
- Which of these images do you connect with most? Why?
  - Perhaps God as shepherd, or rock, or fortress, or strength and shield?

In verses 1-2, David is asking God to hear him, and he is expressing some frustration that God isn't listening.

- Have you ever felt this way, frustrated at the Lord?
- Does it seem presumptuous to you to speak your frustrations at God?
  - Depending on how close/new/mature your group is, this may not be an appropriate/helpful question. However, it may be a discussion starter for deeper conversation. Yes, David is demanding that God hear his cry for mercy. But he is also calling on his Rock – and he recognizes that God is in a Most Holy Place. It's okay to be upset with God, and to be honest with him. He made us, he knows us, he loves us.
- If we just had these two verses, what would you think about David's relationship to God?

In her chart-topping song, *Hello* Adele sings,

There's such a difference between us  
And a million miles

Hello from the other side

I must've called a thousand times  
To tell you I'm sorry for everything that I've done  
But when I call, you never seem to be home

Hello from the outside  
At least I can say that I've tried  
To tell you I'm sorry for breaking your heart  
But it don't matter, it clearly doesn't tear you apart anymore

- How do these lyrics relate to David crying out to the Lord in Psalm 28?

In Psalm 139, the psalmist proclaims that God is everywhere, there's no where we can go that the Lord is not present. But even still, we can *feel* like the Lord is distant or deaf to us.

- What might lead to someone feeling like the Lord is not hearing them, or that God is not nearby?
- How might we respond in seasons where the Lord seems distant?
  - We might begin with noticing and being grateful for God's help and presence when things are well in our lives, when we are thriving, knowing that when trouble comes, we can trust in the Lord's faithfulness. We might also invite fellow Christians to help us carry our burdens, or to be God's presence for us even when God feels far away. We might also continue life-giving routines like prayer, worship, and Communion, as a constant reminder that the Lord is with us and for us.

David proclaims, *"The Lord is the strength of his people, a fortress of salvation for his anointed one."*

- How can our church community at UALC live as though this is true? Is the Lord our strength? Is Christ our Anointed One?
  - Encourage your group to notice where our church community is faithful to this word, and consider ways that your group can be ambassadors of Christ, and a refuge to those who need it.

The psalm concludes with the petition, *"Save your people and bless your inheritance; be their shepherd and carry them forever."*

- In what ways have we experienced the Lord's saving grace and blessings? In what ways has the Lord been your Shepherd?

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## PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

Invite your group to share how they would like to be prayed for today. If anyone needs to be rescued, blessed, or shepherded by the Lord, now is a great time to allow others to ask that of our near and loving Father.

Before you begin praying, you might read vv. 6-9 over the group, or have the group read it aloud together.

# EYE OF THE TIGER

## psalm 35

### FACILITATORS:

### WEEK 8

This week we are hearing Psalm 35 together, paired with *Eye of the Tiger* by Survivor. Consider playing a portion or all of the song to help emphasize the parallels between the psalm and the song. This guide will prompt you in a portion below to ask a question related to the song and this psalm's theme.

### INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

In this summer series we've called Songs of Summer, we're hearing together from the book of Psalms. As we read these psalms, we will notice how they creatively invite us to join the psalmists in their emotions, desires, and proclamations. Each week we're pairing a psalm with a song you might hear on the radio to notice how the themes of the book of Psalms resonate with us thousands of years after they were written.

Jim Peterik, from the band Survivor, co-wrote *Eye of the Tiger* and had this to say about the song's lasting impression: "I guess if you want to analyze it, it would be an unbelievable, powerful beat which is so simple and primal. It's the reason marching bands still make formations to it, it's very simple..." "Then you have the tiger imagery. It's a great image, it's a ferocious image. Then you have the very simple melody—the chorus is like three or four notes. I guess simplicity with a message people can relate to. It's all those things." Psalm 35 shares themes and nuances with Peterik's song – let's take a closer look at them together.

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### OPENING QUESTION:

- Have you ever had a great boss or coach? What made them great?
- Who comes to mind when you think of great leadership? What made/makes them a great leader?

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### OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like this: *Lord, you we begin by proclaiming your majesty and honor. As we prepare to hear this Psalm that speaks of your might and glory, we are so thankful that you have invited us to know you, that you love us, and that you are good to us. Prepare our ears and our hearts for your good news today. Amen.*

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### SCRIPTURE:

Ask someone to read Psalm 35. Thank them for reading.

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## DISCUSSION:

- In vv. 1-6, what has David told the Lord to do?
  - oppose those who...; fight those who...; put on your armor, and take up your shield; prepare for battle, and come to my aid; lift up your...; let me hear you...; bring shame...; turn them back and humiliate...; blow them away; make their path.

In vv. 7-8, David provides justification for what he's told the Lord to do in going to battle on David's behalf against his opposition.

- Can you relate to David prayerfully giving God commands?
  - You might note that David prayed to God in the "imperative mood," that is, he commands or instructs the Lord to do these things on David's behalf.
- In what circumstances might you prayerfully direct the Lord to act?
- What stands out to you in vv.1-8? Share with us your reaction to these verses.
  - Receive all answers.

Have someone read vv. 9-10 from the New Living Translation, or read this to your group.

*"Then I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be glad because he rescues me.  
With every bone in my body I will praise him: "Lord, who can compare with you?  
Who else rescues the helpless from the strong?  
Who else protects the helpless and poor from those who rob them?"*

- How do vv.9-10 differ in tone from the prior verses?

In vv. 11-16, David describes his posture towards "ruthless witnesses." In their time of illness, he humbled himself and fasted on their behalf, and mourned when his prayers "returned unanswered." He treats them like friends or even brothers. But they repay him with evil.

- In what way do we see David being Christlike in this portion of the Psalm?
  - He is praying for his enemies and he is acting in kindness and concern for those who persecute him.
- Have you ever had the opportunity to care for or pray for an enemy? What was that like?
- What are some roadblocks that might prevent us from caring or praying for the good our enemies?



Read, or have someone read, vv. 17-18.

*"How long, O Lord, will you look on and do nothing?  
Rescue me from their fierce attacks.  
Protect my life from these lions!  
Then I will thank you in front of the great assembly.  
I will praise you before all the people."*

(NLT)

This is the second time in the psalm that David expresses that he *will* rejoice in and praise the Lord *after* the Lord fulfills David's commands

- How do you perceive David's motives? For example, is he displaying faith, is he being selfish and/or dishonorable, or something else?
  - Receive all answers. Consider how this psalm differs from others we've heard in our series in its if \_\_\_\_\_, then \_\_\_\_\_ formula.
- Can you relate to David in this portion of his psalm?
  - Receive all answers.

In vv. 22-25, the psalm takes on the tone of an anthem. Let's take a moment to re-read those verses together, then reflect on how they relate to one of our most famous American anthems, *Eye of the Tiger*.

Have someone read vv.22-25.

Now, from *Eye of the Tiger*:

So many times it happens too fast  
You change your passion for glory  
Don't lose your grip on the dreams of the past  
You must fight just to keep them alive

It's the eye of the tiger  
It's the thrill of the fight  
Rising up to the challenge of our rival  
And the last known survivor  
Stalks his prey in the night  
And he's watching us all with the eye of the tiger

Both Psalm 35 and this song are battle anthems.



- Have you every prayed for God to go into battle with you, or for you?
    - Discuss with your group what that prayer might sound like. Are they similar to David's prayer in Psalm 35?
  - When you're facing opposition, do you find yourself turning to the Lord in prayer?
  - How might this psalm show us that our desire to go to battle – to fight opposition – can be an invitation to faith?
    - You might note that this is a major difference between *Eye of the Tiger* and Psalm 35. In the case of the song, there is confidence and readiness for battle, but it is self-centered. In the psalm, David is not self-certain in his ability to overcome his enemies, but is seeking the Lord's strength and protection.
    - If we can pray something like this psalm while also praying "Lord, your will be done," we can seek the Lord's resolution—even his justice—on his own terms, which are always better than our own.
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## PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

In the face of opposition, we may have the desire to fight, but this may also be an invitation to faith. Psalm 35 captures David's feeling, a human need to rise up and fight. And yet, in this psalm we also learn that it is God who fights the battle for us – a lesson that Jesus lived out perfectly in his life on earth.

Invite your group to prayerfully ask the Lord to remind them of areas in their life where they need God's help and victory. After a few moments of reflection, invite them to share, if they're comfortable, and pray together that each of you would, in these instance and at all times, seek the face and shelter of the Lord.

# SATISFACTION

## psalm 42

### FACILITATORS:

### WEEK 9

In many Hebrew manuscripts, Psalms 42 and 43 constitute one psalm. For this small group discussion, consider reading them both together; 16 verses in total.

### INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

With very simple word-pictures, an infectious hook, and poor grammar, the Rolling Stones gave us the famous saying, "I can't get no satisfaction." The song is a perfect illustration of the way we search for comfort, meaning or identity throughout our lives. The famous 4th century theologian, Augustine of Hippo, wrote about the same experience in his autobiography, *Confessions*, where he said, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You." Both the Stones and St. Augustine were reflecting a more ancient truth from Psalm 42.

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### OPENING QUESTIONS:

- Remember a time as a kid when you thought you would die if you couldn't have something. What was that 'something'? Did someone tell you no? Ignore you? Get it for you? How did you react?
  - Share with us a time in your life when you were extremely thirsty. Perhaps you'd been playing a soccer game on a hot, humid day? Or riding your bike?
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### OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like this: *Lord God, thank you for your Word. Thank you for your love and truth to us in Christ. Thank you that we get to gather together and encounter you here tonight. Lord Jesus, we pray you will meet with us, teach us, open our eyes to see and our ears to hear. Grant it to us that we may behold wonderful things out of your word. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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### SCRIPTURE:

Have one or two people read Psalms 42 and 43. Thank them for reading.

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## DISCUSSION:

- How does the psalmist lead into his conversation with God? How does he describe his soul?
  - He likens himself to a deer panting for water, his soul thirsts for the Lord.
- What might these opening verses tell us about the psalmist's relationship with the Lord?
  - Receive all answers.
- Have you ever experienced this depth of desire or thirst for the Lord?
- What might stand in the way between us and this experience of panting with thirst for God?
- How does the psalmist express his thoughts and emotions in vv. 5-11? Does anything here stand out to you?
- Have you ever had a similar experience—a downcast soul?
- How might such an experience of desperation be received as a gift?
- How might it benefit us to take our downcast souls the Lord?
- What names does the psalmist use as they cry out to the Lord?
  - Mighty One, Savior, his Rock (42)
  - Vindicator, Rescuer, Stronghold, his joy and delight (43)
- Is there a name used here that comforts you? Makes you uncomfortable? How might God be challenging you to know him deeper through other names?
- What names do you use to address God as you direct your complaints to Him? How do they express your confidence in him?
- Looking at 42:5, have you ever argued with yourself this way? How so?

The psalmist makes several 'I will' statements, in the course of life or when facing suffering.

- Have you ever said you will praise God and failed to? Promised yourself and God that you would put your hope in him and failed to? Pledged to remember the Lord and failed to? How did it impact your faith walk with God?

Read, or have someone read, Romans 5:1-5.

- How do these things listed in Romans 5:1-5 give us hope in the Lord?
- How is this source of hope and satisfaction different from self-effort or positive self-talk

Psalms like these teach us to see the mystery of Christ at work in the midst of our daily lives and sufferings. Physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, we can experience real pain and suffering. Our bones can 'suffer mortal agony.' But at the same time, mysteriously, Christ meets us there through the Holy Spirit and pours out his love into our hearts. The Spirit draws us to put our hope in God. Reminding us, that though we suffer, yet we will praise Him. He is our Savior and our God.

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### PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

Invite your group to share any ways that they need to receive the hope and satisfaction of the Lord this week. Pray for these things specifically, and consider praying this blessing over the group:

Lord God, thank you that in our darkest moments and experiences, you have not forgotten us. Just as a mother could not forget her nursing child, you will never forget us. Praise you and thank you for pouring out your love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who you have given to us by faith. Praise you for the work of rebirth and regeneration you are doing in and through us, not by our own effort, but by the power of Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

# ANTI-HERO

## psalm 51

### FACILITATORS:

### WEEK 10

Today's psalm is David's response to the prophet, Nathan, confronting David about his grievous sins against Bathsheba and Uriah. You may want to read 2 Samuel 11-12 ahead of the discussion in order to be able to help the group remember the details of the story.

### INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

This week in our Songs of Summer series we will hear together from Psalm 51, a famous song of confession and contrition from David. David had grievously sinned against the Lord and Bathsheba, Uriah, and all the people he was meant to lead and protect. After he was confronted by the prophet Nathan, he is rightfully undone and fearful of the Lord's righteous judgement. We will hear together how David responds to this terrible series of sins he's committed.

Taylor Swift's "Anti-Hero" caught on with her fans almost instantly with the simple lyric, "It's me, hi, I'm the problem, it's me." This somewhat tongue-in-cheek confession resonated with so many people that only a year later, the quote has become iconic. Anti-Hero and Psalm 51 both invite us to be honest about our own sins, shame, and failure.

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### OPENING QUESTIONS:

- Have you ever received an earnest and reconciling apology? What makes for a good apology?
- Have you ever said or done something that you immediately regretted?

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### OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like this: *Lord we thank you for the gift of this small group and our opportunity to meet with you in your Word today. We pray that you would use this psalm and discussion to show us the truth about ourselves, about you, and your merciful, just heart. Amen.*

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### SCRIPTURE:

Have someone read Psalm 51. Thank them for reading.

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## DISCUSSION:

- What do you remember about the story of David, Bathsheba, Uriah, and Nathan that led David to write this Psalm?
  - Encourage your group to paraphrase the story as they remember it, paying attention to what elements they focus on. Consider reading 2 Samuel 11-12 ahead of time to fill in any details that were left out.
  - Note that there is no textual evidence about Bathsheba's will or guilt in this story, and instead the guilt of these events, according to the Bible, is entirely centered on David.
- In what ways did David's sin affect him and those around him?
  - David began with lust and descended into a series of sins that brought him deep shame and alienation from the Lord. He deceived and abused Uriah when he returned from battle, and then conspired his death. David's actions caused the death of Uriah and Bathsheba's baby, and no doubt cast a cloud of fear and distrust over his army and subjects alike. Added to this, this certainly wounded his relationship with his wife, Michal.

Psalms 51 begins with an appeal to God's mercy from his unfailing love and compassion.

- Why does David begin the psalm this way? What does this tell us about David's relationship with the Lord?
  - This shows us that David knows that the Lord will judge him righteously. It also shows that he knows the Lord to be merciful and loving in his judgement, and that David's fate rests entirely in the hands of God's decision.

David lyrically speaks about his relationship with the Lord even before his birth,

<sup>5</sup> Surely I was sinful at birth,  
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

<sup>6</sup> Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;  
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

- What do you think he means when he writes "even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place? What does this tell us about the Lord and God's relationship with us?

David implores the Lord to cleanse and wash him of his sins, to "blot out" his iniquity.

- Why do you think he uses this language? In what ways might we experience sin like a stain?

Imagine the scene of David composing this Psalm. The room he was in, the clothes he wore, the instrument he used, his emotional state and his posture.

- What about this scene stands out to you? What is relatable?

In her song Anti-Hero, Taylor Swift sings,

I should not be left to my own devices  
They come with prices and vices  
I end up in crisis (tale as old as time)

It's me, hi, I'm the problem, it's me  
At tea time, everybody agrees  
I'll stare directly at the sun but never in the mirror  
It must be exhausting always rooting for the anti-hero

- How do the confessions in these lyrics match David's in Psalm 51?
- Have you ever felt like you could sing these lyrics about yourself?

Throughout the psalm, we hear David making some rather bold appeals to how the Lord might judge him. Not only does he ask that God wash him of his sin and make him clean again, but he asks that the Lord not take away his Holy Spirit and restore God's salvation, a willing spirit, and his sustenance.

- Why might David be particularly afraid of losing the Holy Spirit?
  - Not only does he seem to recognize how essential the Holy Spirit is to being a king in right relationship with the Lord, he had seen firsthand, in the case of King Saul before him, the devastating effects of losing the Holy Spirit.
  - Consider reading or paraphrasing 1 Samuel 16:14-23
- How do these verses (10-12) give us insight into the ways our sinfulness can lead us away from the path the Lord intends for us?
  - Note here that there's no evidence the Lord is unwilling to forgive, restore, or abandon David, but David recognizes how terrible that would be. The work of Christ has ensured us that forgiveness and restoration are ours to claim, and the Lord will be ever-presently near us, but the path of sinfulness can mute for us the joy of our salvation, train our spirits to be unwilling to know and love the Lord, and blind us to God's provision and care for us.
  - We pray routinely that the Lord will lead us not into temptation, deliver us from evil, and forgive us of our debts because the consequences of our sin are dark and deathly.
- What does David say he will do in response to the Lord's restoration?
  - *"Then I will teach transgressors your way, so that sinners will turn back to you... and my tongue will sing of your righteousness."* (vv.13-14)
- How might experiencing the Lord's mercy influence us and our posture towards others?



- In what way is a broken and contrite heart a pleasing sacrifice to the Lord?
    - Surrender to the will, healing, and reconciliation of the Lord is crucial for a faith-full life in the Spirit. Receiving God's grace and restoration frees us to live as God's people in God's Kingdom.
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## PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

In response to today's Psalm and discussion, take some time to silently invite the Holy Spirit to bring to mind ways you might be set free from shame or guilt. If there is anything that weighs heavy on your heart, or anything you still feel shameful about, take this opportunity to hand that over to the Lord, so that he may wash you clean as snow.

Consider praying this confession with and over your group:

Facilitator: Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Group: Amen**

Leader: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Leader: Most merciful God,

**Group: we confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole hearts; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen**

Leader: In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for his sake God forgives us all our sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ he gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit.

**Group: Amen**

# BLESSINGS

## psalm 67

### FACILITATORS:

### WEEK 11

Because of the brevity of Psalm 67, you may want to prepare to have your group read the psalm in multiple translations.

### INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

Today we will be reading Psalm 67 together and discussing songs of praise to the Lord. Though, upon first reading this short psalm, it may seem simple, the more we meditate on it the more he blesses us. Chance the Rapper made Gospel music cool again with his 2016 hit record Coloring Book. One of the top singles from that album, Blessings, is an anthem to trusting in the Lord, and giving him the credit for the goodness we experience in life. This same idea is central to Psalm 67, where praise and blessing are tied together, and the purpose of God's blessings for his people is made clear.

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### OPENING QUESTION:

- In what ways do you praise the Lord? Do some ways resonate more with you than others?

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### OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like this: *God, we praise you and thank you for your blessings. We praise you for this group that can meet freely to discuss and meditate on your word. Thank you for this group of people that you have provided. It is through your church that you continue to heap blessings upon us. Amen.*

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### SCRIPTURE:

Have someone read Psalm 67.

Since this is such a short Psalm, multiple people might read different translations of Psalm 67. If someone in your group is brave enough perhaps they could try to sing it!

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### DISCUSSION:

- Share with the group some examples of when you experienced God's blessings in your own life.

- Are there moments when it is easier to recognize God's blessings? Moments when it is harder to recognize them?
- In v.1, the psalmist uses the phrase "*make his face to shine upon us.*" Where else in the Bible is this phrase used and in what context do we often hear it?
  - This is part of the blessing given by Aaron and his sons (Numbers 6:24-26) which is a common benediction given at the end of worship services. The benediction is a bestowing of a blessing.
- Are there times when we do not receive God's blessings? Are there conditions in order to receive God's blessings?
  - Opposite to the phrase, "make his face shine upon us" is the phrase also found in other Psalms "the Lord hides his face." Psalm 13:1, Psalm 27:9, Psalm 30:7.
  - When we turn from God, the scripture uses the imagery that he turns his face from us. Of course, when we turn back to him, he is there making his face shine upon us.
- Along with blessings mentioned throughout the psalm, what other activity does the psalmist give God the credit for in v.2? How are blessings and this other activity tied together in the psalmist's thoughts?
  - God's other activity is the act of saving. God brings salvation to his people and then he provides them with blessings. God had to first *save* the Israelites from Egypt before he could *bless* them with a land flowing with milk and honey.
- In addition to being written as a psalm about blessing Israel, what evidence do we see in the passage that this psalm has special emphasis about God's salvation and blessings to the Gentiles as well?
  - v.2: ways known **to the earth**. v.3: **all the peoples** praise you. v.4: may the **nations** be glad. v.5: **All the peoples** praise you. v.7: **All the ends** of the earth.
  - God's mercy goes beyond just Israel and the Christian church. It is his desire that all peoples will praise him, that he might bestow his blessings on all those that call his name.

In his song, *Blessings*, Chance the Rapper sings,

I'm gon' praise Him, praise Him 'til I'm gone  
 When the praises go up, the blessings come down  
 It seems like blessings keep falling in my lap

- How do these lyrics resemble the psalmist's? How is Chance the Rapper continuing the tradition of praising God thousands of years later?

Have someone read Acts 20:35:

*"In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'it is more blessed to give than to receive.'"*

- How does this passage affirm the words of the psalmist in Psalm 67?
  - How is God calling your small group to bless others? How is God calling you to bless others in your small group?
    - Generosity is how we, the church, pour out God's blessings. He blesses us by blessing others. He blesses others by using his people. As a church and as individuals we are called to bless others abundantly so they can know God's blessings and in turn praise him abundantly.
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## PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

The Lord blesses us in order that we may bless others. The goodness of God is meant to be multiplied in its sharing. Spend time in prayer today reflecting on how you can love Jesus by blessing others. Who is God calling you to bless? Is it another believer or someone that does not yet know the love and mercy of our God?

Consider praying over one another that the Lord would give them the ability and opportunity to bless those that came to mind, and those that haven't yet.

# HELP!

## psalm 83

### FACILITATORS:

### WEEK 12

A portion of this discussion revolves around the story of Gideon from Judges 6-8. Consider reading this story ahead of time so that you can paraphrase it with your group, or make time to read the story in passages provided in the relevant question below.

### INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

Psalm 83 is introduced as a song, a psalm attributed to Asaph, a Levite who was commissioned by David to sing in the house of the Lord. Its theme will be familiar to us, a cry to the Lord for God's protection and rescue amid frightening circumstances. To where do we turn when things seem out of control? In the famous song, "Help!" the Beatles perfectly communicate the desperation that we hear in Psalm 83. When life is out of control and problems are simply too big for us to handle, we need someone to step in and deliver us. Who can we turn to for help?

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### OPENING QUESTION:

- When you're in need of help, either with a project or in need of some advice, who are the people you ask?
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### OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like this: *Lord, we know that you are our ever-present help in every time of need. As we meet with you in this Psalm and in our discussion, we praise you for your care and provision for us, and we ask that you would deepen our faith and reliance on you. Amen.*

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### SCRIPTURE:

Have someone read Psalm 83. Thank them for reading.

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### DISCUSSION:

This psalm begins with a similar petition to psalms we've heard earlier in our series, but in this instance, notice that the psalmist is praying a petition of help on behalf of others.

- What is the psalmist's concern in this passage? What has led him to sing this prayer?
  - The nations are conspiring against Israel, and God's cherished people are under the threat of death.

The psalmist refers to these conspiring nations as "those you [God] hate" or "your foes."

- What does this tell us about the psalmist's understanding of the threat against Israel, and specifically about the leaders of these nations?
  - In Genesis 12:3, the Lord promises to make Abram's descendants into a great nation, and "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." As part of the Lord's plan to bless the world through his people, God bound himself to defend them, including cursing those who curse them. The psalmist took the Lord's promise to heart and identified these nations as a threat to God's chosen people.

In vv. 9-12, the psalmist implores the Lord to "do to them as you did in Midian..."

- What event is the psalmist remembering and asking the Lord to repeat?
  - Either help your group paraphrase the story of Gideon from Judges 6-8, or, if the story is unfamiliar, considering taking turns reading the following passages: Judges 6:1-12, 7:1-8, and 7:17-25.
  - If you'd like to complete the story of Gideon and hear how Israel returned to their idolatry in spite of God's victory for them, read 8:22-27, 33-35.
- What stands out to you in the story of God's victory in Midian?
- How has hearing and sharing stories about God helped you in times of trouble? What stories have helped you?

In v.15 the psalmist asks the Lord "*pursue them with your tempest and terrify them with your storm.*"

- What does this request tell us about the kind of help the psalmist is looking for from God?
  - The psalmist is relying on the power of the Creator and Sustainer of all of creation to intercede on Israel's behalf. They know the Lord is not limited by anything, and they anticipate God's help in whatever way the Lord chooses to provide it, be it "practical" or miraculous means.
  - This is a good reminder that the things that seem insurmountable to us cannot defeat God.

In the following verse (16), the psalmist makes a request that seems inconsistent with his other requests for God's judgement. "*Cover their faces with shame, Lord, so that they will seek your name.*"

- What might we learn and practice from the portion of the psalmist's prayer? Why might he pray this?
  - Despite a persistent theme of wanting Israel's enemies to be defeated, the psalmist also prays that God might cause them to turn from their enmity towards God (and Israel) and instead seek the Lord. Notice how this coincides with Jesus' instructions for us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, and it is consistent with how God sometimes deals with his enemies, as is the case in the book of Jonah with the story of the King of Nineveh.

In their title track from their fifth studio album, *Help*, the Beatles sing this,

In oh so many ways  
My independence seems to vanish in the haze  
But every now and then  
I feel so insecure  
I know that I just need you like  
I've never done before

Help me if you can, I'm feeling down  
And I do appreciate you being 'round  
Help me get my feet back on the ground  
Won't you please, please help me

- How do these lyrics echo the sentiment of the psalmist?
    - You might notice the vanishing of independence and the acknowledgement of insecurity.
  - To what or whom might we be tempted to look for help in times of trouble other than the Lord?
  - How can we be more like this psalmist and turn to God in our times of trouble and need?
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## PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

Today's psalm and discussion reminded us of the Lord's ability to meet us in our times of trouble and need, and to overcome even the things that seem insurmountable. Spend time prayerfully considering the ways you need the Lord's help—big or small—this week. Share with one another, as you're comfortable, how you can pray together for God's help, and how you might have faith to trust in the Lord in this time.



# HAPPY!

## psalm 96

### FACILITATORS:

### WEEK 13

Part of our discussion centers on lyrics from the song *Happy* by Pharrell Williams. You might play part or all of this song for the group to help. You may want to provide paper and pens for prayer and ministry time.

### INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

Throughout this series, we've leaned into difficult and complex emotions. To finish this series, we'll keep things simple. Happy, by Pharrell, is a simple and infectious song that is meant to communicate joy. Similarly, Psalm 96, like many of the praise Psalms, paints a beautiful and broad picture of just how much celebration the Lord deserves. We will wrap up the series with a celebration of our God and the praise that is due his name.

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### OPENING QUESTION:

- What is something the Lord has done this past week that we can praise him for?
  - Do you have a favorite hymn or worship song? What makes this your favorite?
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### OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like this: *Father in Heaven, we begin with our praise and worship to you. You are our God and worthy of all honor and glory. As we hear and discuss this psalm, we look to see your face and take joy in your presence. Amen.*

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### SCRIPTURE:

Have someone read Psalm 96. Thank them for reading.

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### DISCUSSION:

Psalm 96 begins with the directive,  
*Sing to the Lord a new song;  
sing to the Lord, all the earth.*

- Why direct the earth to sing a *new* song to the Lord?
  - Because the Lord is merciful, generous, our Reconciler, Defender, Friend, Father, Liberator, and Helper, if we are attentive, we will constantly find new reasons to praise the Lord.
  - We also sing new songs because music is one of the good gifts the Lord has given us to express and experience an array of emotions and events. *“He who sings prays twice.”*

The psalmist then wrote,

*Declare his glory among the nations,  
his marvelous deeds among all peoples.*

- What does this tell us about how the psalmist understood God’s work in the world? His relationship with nations other than Israel?
  - While many of the psalms center on God’s blessings and defense of Israel (and casting other nations as threats and enemies), this psalm speaks to God’s “marvelous deeds among all peoples.”
- How might being attentive to God’s activity in the lives of others, even other nations or those who do not yet know the Lord, give us more reasons to praise him?
  - God is not stingy with his blessings or love, and the evidence of God’s goodness is all around us. WE can honor God for the mercies and justice we see from him in the lives of those around us.
  - In fact, one way we might witness to others about God is by sharing with them the many ways we see God’s blessings over them and love for them.

In v.9 worshipping the Lord is paired with trembling before him.

- What does it mean to tremble before the Lord? How is worship related to trembling?
  - The Lord does not allow sinfulness to go unchecked. God uses discipline to draw people back to himself and to save people from suffering. As often as we are tempted to selfishly and sinfully pursue our own will instead of God’s we should remember that any path other than the Lord’s is not the way towards life but towards death, and that should cause us reverent concern.

In v.10 the psalmist proclaims that the Lord reigns over all nations, holds the world firm, and will judge “the peoples with equity.”

- How does this description of the Lord distinguish him from other leaders and powers in our world?
  - The Lord intends for everyone in the world to be blessed and blesses his people with the explicit intention that they would bless others and be ambassadors of Christ to everyone else.
  - There are no nations or rulers that outmatch or overwhelm the Lord. It is evident that God permits evil and suffering for a time, but this will not last forever and God’s justice comes, often in this present age, and entirely in the age to come (when King Jesus returns).
- How might the words, “he will judge the peoples with equity” be received? In what ways might one respond to that proclamation?
  - Consider with your group for whom that would good news and for whom that might be a warning.
  - How might we who are simultaneously saints and sinners receive that word?

The psalm concludes with a stanza inviting the heavens, sea (and all that's in it), the fields (and everything in them), the trees of the forest, and all creation to be glad, resound, be jubilant, and sing for joy.

- What impression does this stanza leave on you? How might we respond to this type of poetry?
  - Encourage your group to let allow this poetry do what poetry is supposed to do, cause wonder, delight, and fill our hearts with emotion. You might take time to read this last stanza again for the group in a different translation (NASB or MSG?), so that they hear it again with fresh ears.

Pharrell Williams sings an anthem of celebration in his hit song, *Happy*.

Here come bad news talking this and that  
Well give me all you got, don't hold back  
Well I should probably warn you I'll be just fine  
No offense to you don't waste your time  
Here's why

Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof  
(Because I'm happy)  
Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth  
Clap along if you know what happiness is to you  
Clap along if you feel like that's what you wanna do

- In what ways might it be good for us to celebrate happiness, maybe even in the face of bad news?
  - There are times for sorrow and mourning, and we ought not pretend things are fine when they aren't, or bury our hurts or put on masks to hide our feelings. And we shouldn't respond to others' grief with platitudes. But, we may also be tempted to let certain aspects, events, or relationships in our lives blind us to what is healthy, good, and exciting. Practicing gratitude to the Lord in the form of praise is demonstrably good for the healthiness of our minds. Psalms like these are good for us holistically.
- What are some things your life right now for which you are happy and grateful?
- How might we be people who routinely experience and express joy and gratitude?

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## PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

After spending time sharing together what you are happy about and grateful for, pray prayers of thanksgiving to God for all of these things. Thank God on behalf of the things your friends have shared today. You might provide paper and pens for your group to write these things down, and you can encourage them to consider making gratitude journaling a routine for the next few weeks.