



Psalms

Devotional



Prepared by Tatenda Chikwekwe 2026

Welcome to **EVERYTHING**

A Devotional in Psalms

This six-session devotional was built from the book of Psalms based on the theme for SYC 2026, which is "Everything".

Every breath, every fear, every doubt. The Psalms are where that theme actually comes to life. It's one of the books in the Bible where people brought absolutely everything to God and all the emotion of life is seen. Their joy, their grief, their confusion, their anger, their hope.

Nothing was too much and nothing was off limits. That's what we want your relationship with God to feel like too.

Each session works through one psalm and follows the same shape. It opens with something to read out loud, moves through a short teaching on the psalm broken into a few clear points, and finishes with discussion questions, reflection time and space to actually write something down.

FOR LEADERS

Run this as a group session, read the whole thing out loud rather than summarising it. You can use it as your youth talk or divide the points up and have a few people reading.

It's written to be spoken, not just skimmed silently. Give it a normal conversational pace, not a formal reading voice.

Pause after the psalm is read and let it sit for a second before moving into the teaching. Use the discussion questions in small groups rather than as a whole room, most people open up more in a small setting.

Encourage them to write notes and capture reflections in the moment and allow time for this.

FOR INDIVIDUALS

For personal use, these work just as well one on one. Read the session slowly, sit with the psalm itself before reading the teaching underneath it.

Take time to write in the space provided for the questions instead of just thinking about them. Capture your reflections, something happens when you put words on paper that doesn't happen just thinking it over in your head and you have a place to go back to in the coming weeks.

Every breath, every fear, every doubt. Every single one of them belongs in this book, and every single one belongs to God.

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SESSION 1

When You've Got Doubts

Read *Psalm 73*

"Just have faith, mate." People mean well when they say it. It's usually the first thing out of someone's mouth when you admit you're struggling. Here's the problem, though. The hardest part about doubt isn't dealing with it; it's admitting you've got it in the first place. Faith can feel like a stack of dominoes. Pull one out and maybe the whole thing falls. So most of us just don't say anything.

It starts small, too. Is there even any point praying if nothing changes? Then that question drags another one out behind it. Does God actually hear me? Does He care? And before you know it you're sitting with the big one, is God even real?

And once that's rattling around in your head, it's weirdly easy to get jealous of the mates who don't believe in anything at all. They get to say so out loud. We feel like we can't. Try admitting you're doubting when you're at youth group, or up the front on the worship team, or the person everyone assumes has it together. Good luck starting that conversation.

But the doubts don't go anywhere just because you keep quiet. They grow like weeds do. Leave them alone long enough and they end up running the show instead of you.

Which is where it gets interesting, because sometimes just have faith actually is the right answer. Trusting God does get people through hard patches. But so does the opposite move, actually asking the question and sticking around long enough to hear an answer. Psalm 73 walks through what that looks like, in five moves.

Half the time a question gets brushed off because whoever you asked feels attacked. Sometimes they've genuinely never thought about it. Sometimes they just don't know. Either way, a lot of churches have ended up with this unspoken rule that asking questions makes you a bad Christian. Which is backwards.

Christianity was never meant to be a don't ask questions religion. Go read Acts. The first Christians are constantly out there defending what they believe, giving reasons for the resurrection, answering whatever gets thrown at them.

Faith's not a switch. It's a muscle. It gets stronger the more you actually use it, which means everyone sits somewhere between total confidence and total doubt, and that's just normal. It's the same thing the dad says in Mark 9, I believe, help me with the bit I don't.

Psalm 73 is one of the clearest pictures in the Bible of what that process actually looks like. And it's not written by some random guy having a rough week, it's the worship leader. The person whose whole job is helping other people connect with God, admitting his own faith nearly came apart. That's worth paying attention to.





Say Where You've Landed

This isn't really a psalm about doubt. It's a psalm about doubt that got answered. Funny thing is, it opens with the ending, "God is good to Israel." That's the conclusion. Only after that does he admit, "But as for me, my feet had almost slipped, my steps had almost given way."

So even the guy leading worship has wobbly moments. Good to know.

Before we get into how he worked through it, it's worth sitting with why he opens this way at all. Being honest about where you've actually been matters. Everyone wonders at some point whether God's being fair, whether trying to do the right thing is even worth it, and those moments get heavier fast if you think you're the only one who's ever felt them. Telling your own story gives someone else permission to ask their questions too.

Say What's Actually Wrong

Then he names it. The wicked are winning, and he's not just mildly confused about it, he's furious. Doing the right thing doesn't seem to count for anything while dishonest people are healthy, comfortable, doing just fine.

He spends nearly ten verses on how good the wicked have it, before he finally snaps, "Surely I have kept my heart pure in vain, I have washed my hands in innocence for nothing." He feels punished every morning for trying, while people who don't even bother are cruising.

Sounds a bit dramatic. Doesn't matter. There's no point tidying up your complaint before you bring it to God. Say what you actually think. Sea cucumbers, weirdly enough, have a defence mechanism where they'll spit out their own insides when attacked. The predator gets what it wants, swims off, and the sea cucumber slowly grows it all back. Sounds full on, but it's not a bad picture of what God's after here. Psalm 62 puts it plainly, trust in Him at all times, pour out your hearts before Him. You can't deal with a problem you're too polite to put on the table. He puts everything on the table. And because it's all out there, God can actually do something with it.

Mind Who's Listening

This psalm's a strong case for asking hard questions. But there's a line worth watching, because honest doubt can quietly slide into something else, a refusal to ever be satisfied, no matter the answer. That's the gap between working through doubt and turning into a cynic. A cynic questions everything as a habit, sees through everything, ends up believing nothing. And more often than not, gets a kick out of unsettling everyone else's faith along the way.

He pulls back from that edge. "If I had spoken out like this, I would have betrayed your children."

He's not saying it was wrong to voice the doubt, half this psalm is exactly that. He's saying it would've been wrong to teach it as fact. Standing up and telling everyone being good gets you nowhere, do whatever you want, based on one bad week would've done real damage.

So voice the doubts. Just hold a little doubt about the doubts too. The trouble starts when you get so sure of them that you start teaching them like they're facts.





Use Your Brain

Next move, he actually sits down and thinks it through. "When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply." Doesn't take long for him to realise thinking alone won't hand him the answer. He puts in the effort anyway.

Which matters, because God gave you a brain and expects you to use it. Thinking carefully about hard questions is part of the job. So is finding out what other people have already worked out. Hebrews 12 talks about being surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. Whatever you're stuck on has probably been asked before, by someone who found something worth passing on.

Reasoning has limits, though. The philosopher Blaise Pascal talked about two ditches to avoid, shutting reason out completely, or trusting nothing but reason. Take the good answer when there is one. But accept that thinking won't close every gap. Even after wrestling with it, the problem still troubled him. When you hit the edge of what reasoning can do, it's fine to land where Paul does in 2 Corinthians 4, hard pressed but not crushed, perplexed but not in despair.

Let Worship Change The View

"Till I entered the sanctuary of God, then I understood." Even after saying the hard thing out loud and thinking it through, he's still stuck. The shift only happens in worship.

Stop staring at yourself, or other people, or the problem. Put the focus back on God, and things start settling into place. Like a wheel, the spokes only line up once they're connected to the hub. Worship reconnects him to the centre. Everything downstream of that starts making sense.

Three things look different from there. Where the wicked actually end up, for one. We envy someone's money or freedom or health without ever looking at their whole life, past, present, future. Nobody actually wants someone else's entire life, good parts included. We just want their good bits stitched onto ours. From God's angle the ending looks completely different, hollow, temporary, like a dream when one awakes. Proverbs 24 backs this up, don't envy people who do wrong, because getting what they've got means becoming what they are.

What envy did to him, too. He owns it, bitter, cut up, running on gut feeling instead of sense. Someone once described envy as drinking poison and hoping the other person gets sick.

And who God actually is. This is the big one. He lands on the real goodness of God. We tend to want that goodness to mean God hands over what we want and leaves us to enjoy it. Verse 28 says something else entirely, the nearness of God is my good. The joy on offer isn't a prize you collect and walk off with, it comes from staying close. It's basically the vine and branches thing Jesus says in John 15, apart from Him, nothing.

He holds on, even in the middle of our stubbornness, God stays. He's promised not to walk away, even when we're difficult to be around. He guides, not just present, but leading, with a path already marked out so you're not stumbling around trying to find it yourself. And He receives, there at the start, in the middle, at the end. Staying close now is what staying close forever looks like. Heaven isn't a list of things you get. It's being fully in that presence, permanently.



So What Now?

The centre of this psalm is verse 28, the nearness of God is my good. But the line worth actually taking with you might be verse 26, my flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Your mind will let you down sometimes. So will your body. You won't always be the best judge of what actually brings you joy in the long run. God doesn't run out, though. When your strength gives out, He becomes the strength. When it feels like you've got nothing left, He's what's actually there. So do what he ends up doing in verse 28, I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge.

Let's Talk About It

Use these for a group discussion or as personal journalling prompts. Space is left below each question for writing.

What are some unhelpful ways people deal with doubt? How could we get better at helping each other through it?

Ever caught yourself envying people who don't seem to care about doing the right thing?

What does it mean that God is the strength of your heart forever, and what would it look like to actually live like that's true?

What do you make of the nearness of God being described as our good, not stuff, not comfort, just being close to Him?



SESSION 2

Is There Actually A Reason I'm Here?

Read Psalm 57

Ever have one of those weeks where everything feels random? You wake up, do the same routine, scroll your phone, get through school or work, and by Thursday you're wondering if any of it actually adds up to something. Underneath most of the restlessness people feel is some version of that question. Is there an actual reason I'm here, or am I just going through the motions until something happens?

Purpose changes everything about how you carry hard stuff. Say your coach tells you you're running extra sprints after every training session for the whole term. If you think it's punishment, you'll drag your feet through every one of them. But if she pulls you aside first and says it's because she's put your name forward for the state squad and wants you ready, you'd turn up early. Same sprints. Completely different mindset.

Or think about getting a text from a teacher asking you to stay back after class. If you think you're in trouble, your stomach drops the second the bell rings. But if it turns out they want to tell you they're nominating you for a leadership role, that walk to the classroom feels completely different. Nothing about the situation changed. Just what you understood was behind it.

Knowing God actually has a purpose for you would change how you read your whole life. What you do with the good stuff. How you carry the pain. So how do you actually find it?

David wrote this one hiding in a cave, running from King Saul, who had a small army out hunting him down. Everything in David's life had gone wrong at once. He hadn't done anything to deserve it either. He'd been anointed the next king, and Saul hated him for it.

"Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge, in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by. I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me."

What's strange about this psalm is that David never once asks God to fix his situation. He doesn't ask for Saul to back off, or for better shelter, or for the whole mess to just be over. The only thing he keeps asking for is this, be exalted, O God, above the heavens, let your glory be over all the earth. He wants God to be seen clearly through what he's going through, more than he wants to be rescued from it.

And he says it with a strange kind of confidence, I will lie down to rest in the midst of fiery beasts, I will arise early in the morning and sing and make melody. Instead of losing sleep, David's sleeping fine and waking up to write songs. Here's three things this psalm can teach you about your own purpose.





God has a purpose for you, and it's not actually about you

You can see it in the line David keeps repeating, God, may you be exalted above the heavens, let your glory be over all the earth. Bigger than his own rescue is his prayer for God to be seen. That's a hard thing to sit with, because most of us are wired to think we're the main character. We do a good deed but make sure someone's filming it for our story first. We show up to something and quietly measure how it went by how we came across. We pray, but a lot of our prayers are really just help me get this, stop that person, make things go the way I want. Here's the thing though. God made the world to put his own glory on display, not ours. The stars, the oceans, the way a sunset looks at the end of a bad day, all of it exists to point somewhere bigger than us. Then he made people and, weirdly, invited us to be part of that story. Instead of taking that seriously, we took the brush and painted ourselves in the middle instead. That's basically what sin is. Wanting to be the point of your own life.

Jesus didn't do that. Even though he had every right to run the world from the centre, he gave that up, took on a normal body, and let himself be treated like nothing, all so we could be brought back in. His glory was never the selfish kind. It was the kind that gives itself away to save people who didn't deserve it.

You won't understand your own purpose until you get that part. You weren't created to have God fit neatly into your life alongside footy, friends, and whatever else matters to you. You were created for him. It's less about adding God to your world and more about realising whose world it actually is.

God has a purpose for you, and it's mostly about what he's doing in you

Look how many times David mentions his soul finding refuge in God in verse one alone. His refuge wasn't the cave he was hiding in. It wasn't the small group of loyal guys with him, even though Saul's army outnumbered them completely. It wasn't his aim with a slingshot either, decent as that was. His refuge was God's steadfast love. That's what he actually ran into. God cares more about your character than your comfort. This life is short. You'll spend a lot more of forever somewhere else than you will here, so it makes sense that God's more focused on shaping who you're becoming than on making this bit easy.

Sometimes he lets your usual places of refuge fail on purpose, so you actually learn this. Maybe your refuge has been your grades, or how you look, or being the funny one in the group, or just numbing out with your phone until the feeling passes. All of that eventually runs out. He lets it run out so his steady love becomes the thing you actually rely on, instead of just the thing you fall back on when everything else has already failed.





God has a purpose for you, and if you're surrendered to it, he'll finish it

God will fulfill his purpose for me, David says in verse two. The word behind fulfill means to bring something all the way to completion, not just start it and wander off. God doesn't leave things half done. Ever started a school project with heaps of motivation and then lost interest halfway through? God's not like that with you. He finishes what he starts.

That doesn't mean your decisions don't matter. It means that once you actually hand your life over to what he's doing, he has a way of weaving even your mistakes into it. Not because the mistakes were good, but because nothing gets wasted once it's surrendered. A rough year, a bad decision, a friendship that fell apart, none of it has to be the end of the story.

Here's the irony. The moment you stop trying to be the centre of your own life is the moment things actually start making sense. Chase your own comfort and glory, and life stays exhausting. Hand it over, and God has a way of using literally everything, even the stuff that felt pointless at the time, for something bigger than you could've planned yourself.

Think about what that actually means for you right now. At school, are you chasing marks and popularity for their own sake, or is there something bigger underneath it? On the field, is winning the whole point, or is there a purpose your talent is actually pointed at? In your friendships and on your feed, are you living for people to notice you, or for something that outlasts the algorithm? None of those things are wrong on their own. The question is what's actually running the show underneath them.

So What Now?

God has a purpose for you, and he wants to use your life to make himself known, and he wants to teach you to actually trust him along the way. So in whatever situation you're in right now, it's okay to ask God to change it. But don't stop there. Ask him to be seen clearly through it too. Ask him to help you know him more in the middle of it, not just get you out the other side.

The whole thing comes down to this. You didn't stumble into existence by accident, and you weren't made to spend your life orbiting yourself.

You were made by him and for him, loved enough that he gave up everything to bring you back when you'd wandered off. What's left is to actually live like that's true, one ordinary day at a time.



Let's Talk About It

*Use these for a group discussion or as personal journaling prompts.
Space is left below each question for writing.*

Think of a time something felt pointless until you understood the reason behind it. What changed once you knew the purpose?

Where in your life have you been quietly making yourself the main character, even without meaning to?

What's something you've leaned on as a refuge that ended up letting you down?

Does God feel more like an addition to your life, or the centre of it? What would need to change for that to shift?

What's one area right now, school, sport, friendships, or something else, where you could hand God the outcome instead of trying to control it yourself?



SESSION THREE

Let Everything That Has Breath

Psalm 150

Ever sat through a film where everything's been building the whole way through, and right at the end the music swells and it all just clicks? That's a bit like what happens at the end of the Psalms. Psalm 150 is the last track on the album, the one where everything gets turned up as loud as it'll go.

Each of the first four sections of the Psalms ends with a short line of praise, maybe a sentence or two. By the time you hit the very end of the whole collection though, that short line has grown into an entire song. This psalm isn't just wrapping up one section. It's wrapping up everything, and it does it by throwing the whole thing into praise.

Worth noticing too, the very first psalm opens by telling you how to live with God. Delight in His word, think about it constantly, build your life around it. Right down at the other end of the book, the very last psalm tells you how that life is meant to finish up. Not a checklist. Not a set of rules you've finally mastered. Praise. You start by delighting in His word and you end up delighting in Him.

In between those two points, the Psalms cover pretty much everything a person could feel. Psalm 23 has you walking through the worst valley of your life and somehow still sensing God right beside you. Psalm 88 has you feeling like He's gone completely silent, even though He hasn't gone anywhere. Whatever you're carrying right now probably has a psalm that matches it. And wherever you're at, this is where the whole book eventually lands.

"Praise the LORD! Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in His mighty heavens! Praise Him for His mighty deeds; praise Him according to His excellent greatness! Praise Him with trumpet sound; praise Him with lute and harp! Praise Him with tambourine and dance; praise Him with strings and pipe! Praise Him with sounding cymbals; praise Him with loud clashing cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!"

Notice the shape of it. It opens and closes with the same command, praise Him. In between, it works through where, why, how, and who. Let's go through them.

Where: Everywhere, Not Just Here

"Praise Him in His sanctuary, praise Him in His mighty heavens." Praise doesn't just belong in a church building on a Sunday morning. It belongs everywhere, on earth and beyond it. There's an old hymn line for this, praise Him, all creatures here below, praise Him above, the heavenly hosts. Underneath and up above. Ordinary Tuesday and eternity.

Which means praise isn't something you switch on for an hour a week and switch off for the rest. It runs underneath your whole life, training, class, the walk home, lying awake at midnight scrolling your phone. There's nowhere praise doesn't belong. And if that's true, it says something about how a life is meant to end too. You don't finish well by having everything figured out. You finish well still praising Him, wherever you happen to be standing when it's time.





Why: For What He's Done and Who He Is

"Praise Him for His mighty deeds, praise Him according to His excellent greatness." Two reasons, sitting side by side. What He's done. Who He is.

Think about your own life for a second. Something you got through that you probably shouldn't have. Someone who turned up in your life at exactly the right moment. Stuff that could've gone badly and somehow didn't. Every bit of that is worth naming instead of letting it slide past unnoticed. But underneath all of it sits one thing bigger than the rest. Whatever you've walked through, the biggest thing God's ever done for anyone who trusts Him happened at the cross. Everything else gets measured against that.

Praise isn't only about what God gives you, though. It's about who He is. He's not a means to something better. He is the something better. You know that mate who says best feed I've ever had literally every single time you go to Maccas together? It's a running joke because it's obviously exaggerated. We're surrounded by that kind of hype. Every second ad on your feed is promising some skincare routine or supplement is about to change your whole life. You go numb to it eventually, because none of it's true.

Here's the strange thing. You cannot overhype God. There's no compliment big enough, no description grand enough, to count as exaggeration. Every word you could throw at Him still falls short of who He actually is. That's not marketing. It's just true. Which means you'll never run out of reasons to praise Him, and you'll never quite catch up to how much praise He's worth.

How: With Everything You've Got

Verses three to five read like a list of every instrument available at the time. Trumpets for the big national moments. Tambourines and dancing for the kind of win worth celebrating loudly, like the moment Israel danced on the far side of the Red Sea after just being saved from an army chasing them down. Then harps, pipes, and strings, the instruments people would've had out at an ordinary Friday night with friends.

So praise isn't reserved for the big, dramatic moments only. It shows up at national celebrations and at ordinary hangouts with mates. Loud praise, quiet praise, the kind you shout and the kind you barely whisper under your breath. The psalm's not fussy about the style. It just wants everything you've got thrown into it, whatever instrument, whatever voice, whatever version of you happens to show up.

Who: Literally Everyone and Everything

"Let everything that has breath praise the LORD." Not just the people who feel like it today. Not just the ones who've got their life together. Everything still breathing gets swept into that line, which means you're in it too.

The oldest lie ever told was that God wasn't actually worth living for, that there was something better out there if you just went looking yourself. That lie's still doing the rounds. It shows up whenever your worth starts coming from somewhere other than Him, whenever something else quietly becomes what you're actually orbiting. The Psalms open by pointing you to God's word instead of that lie. They close by showing you what believing the truth actually looks like, praise, with your whole life. You were made for it.



So What Now?

So praise doesn't stay in one building for one morning a week. It's for what He's done and for who He actually is. It gets everything you've got, loud or quiet, big moment or ordinary Tuesday. And it's not just for the people who've got it together. It's for everyone still breathing, which includes you, right now, exactly as you are.

Maybe the real question this week isn't whether you believe in God. It's what you're actually giving all of yourself to. Something's already sitting in that spot, whether it's your grades, your image, your relationships, or whatever's loudest on your phone right now. Psalm 150 is an invitation to hand that spot over to the only one who's actually worth it.

Let's Talk About It

Use these for a group discussion or as personal journalling prompts. Space is left below each question for writing.

Where does your praise of God usually get boxed into? What would it look like to bring it into the rest of your week?

What's something God has actually done in your life that you've never properly stopped to thank Him for?

What's something in your life right now that gets more hype and energy from you than God does?

Does your praise tend to show up more in the big dramatic moments or the ordinary ones? What would it take to bring both?

If your whole life is meant to end in praise, what would need to change now for that to actually be true?



SESSION 4

What Are You Actually Banking Your Hope On?

Psalm 33

Think about what you actually lean on when things get shaky. Your grades. A friend group. How training's going. What people think of you online. All of it can shift under you without much warning, a friendship can fall apart, a relationship can end, a season can go badly, a family can go through something hard. If your hope is resting on any of that, it's resting on something that was never built to hold that kind of weight.

Psalm 33 points to the one thing that actually is built for it. Three separate times in this psalm, the writer circles back to the same phrase, God's steadfast love. Not love that comes and goes depending on your mood or your track record. Love that stays put no matter what.

"Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright. Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings! Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts. For the word of the LORD is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD."

That last line is worth sitting with. The earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord. Look anywhere and there's evidence of it, whether you notice it or not. The rest of the psalm answers a simple question. What exactly am I getting when I'm on the receiving end of that kind of love?

What You Actually Get With Love Like This

His word is upright. Whatever God tells you, you can build on it. He's never once lied to you, and everything he's said is right, helpful, and good, even the bits that are hard to hear. He's faithful in his work. He never fails to follow through on what he's promised. On your laziest, most switched off day, he's still working. The psalm actually says he never sleeps. He's committed to what's right. Because he's completely good, what he fights for is what's actually good and just, and he fights for that on your behalf, constantly, whether you notice or not. He's in control of everything. Because he loves you, he's sovereign over his whole creation. That means your world might feel completely out of your control right now, but it was never out of his.

His advice is always good. Whatever he calls you toward is always what's actually best for you. He physically cannot point you somewhere that ends up being bad for you.

He's watching, closely. He never takes his eyes off you. Think about that for a second. The one holding the whole universe together is paying careful attention to you specifically.

He fights for you. He's constantly winning battles on your behalf that you couldn't win on your own, even the ones you never see happening.

He's your help and your shield. Constantly providing, constantly protecting, even on your most doubtful, faithless day. He doesn't clock off when you're struggling to trust him.

This isn't just a psalm about God in some general sense. It's about Jesus. He's the one at the Father's right hand doing every single one of these things for the people who trust him right now. He keeps his promises, he's faithful in his work, he rules in what's right, he's sovereign, he counsels, he watches, he delivers, he's your help and shield. Everything Psalm 33 promises, Jesus is it. That's where your hope actually gets to rest.





Trustworthy By Nature

"For the word of the LORD is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD." Whatever God does is right, not because he's following some rulebook, but because rightness is just who he is. He doesn't just do good things either. He actually enjoys doing them. People can promise you the world and mean it in the moment. Some of them will let you down anyway, not because they wanted to, but because people run out. God doesn't run out. His word holds because his character holds.

Powerful By Nature

"By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host. He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; he puts the deeps in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm." He didn't need effort to build the universe. He spoke, and it existed. That's the same God whose love you're being asked to trust.

The Eye Of The Lord

"Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love." Read that carefully. Who's God watching? The people who fear him. And then the very next line describes the same people a different way, the ones who hope in his steadfast love. Put those together and you get something worth remembering. To fear God isn't to be scared of him. It's to hope in him.

That's not how fear normally works. Usually if you're afraid of something you want distance from it. But fearing God means standing in awe of him, taking him seriously, worshipping him, and because you do, nothing else gets to hold that kind of power over you anymore. Not what people think of you. Not how your year's going. Not whatever's stressing you out right now. If your hope is in him, none of that gets the final say.

Paul says something similar in Romans 8. If God is for us, who can be against us? Nothing in death or life, nothing today or tomorrow, no power anywhere, can separate you from the love of God in Jesus. That's the same steadfast love Psalm 33 has been talking about the whole way through.

So What Now?

Whatever else falls through this year, whoever else lets you down when it matters, this stays true. The one whose hope rests in the unfailing love of God will never end up ashamed of where he put his trust. You might feel like you're running low on confidence right now. Whatever little you've got left, put it there.



Let's Talk About It

*Use these for a group discussion or as personal journalling prompts.
Space is left below each question for writing.*

What parts of your life do you feel most grateful for when you think about your friends, your stuff, the things you get to do, your favourite food, or the fun ways you spend your time?

Have you ever sat down and actually listed the good things in your life that have come from God? If not, what's one specific way he's shown you love or kindness lately?

Why do you think it matters to notice the good things in your life as gifts rather than coincidences? How do you think it lands with God when we actually thank him for how he's blessed us?

How does remembering God's love for you help you spot Jesus in parts of the Bible that don't mention him by name? Why might it matter to look for him there, and in the rest of your life too?



SESSION 5

Why Does Life Still Get Hard If God Loves Me?

Psalm 107:43

Psalm 107 opens with something simple. Give thanks to the Lord, because He is good. Not because life's going well. Not because everything's worked out. Just because of who He is. His steadfast love lasts forever.

Steadfast love isn't the kind of love that comes and goes depending on your mood or your mistakes. It's not casual. It's the kind that stays when things get hard instead of walking off. A lot of the love we experience from people, even good people, has limits. God's doesn't. It doesn't vanish the moment you stuff something up. It sticks around, on purpose, all the way through.

So Why Does Life Still Get Hard?

Here's the question that naturally follows. If God's love is that solid, why do hard seasons happen at all? Why does school stress you out, why do friendships fall apart, why does a season get ruined by injury, why does a family go through something rough? God's got the power to change any of that. He actually cares. And yet hardship still turns up anyway.

The book of Hebrews takes this question seriously instead of brushing past it. Chapter 12 says something that flips the usual assumption. Hardship isn't proof that God's checked out. A lot of the time, it's actually proof that He's involved.

Hebrews points back to people who trusted God long before us and still went through suffering, uncertainty, and loss the whole way through. They kept going anyway, laying aside whatever was weighing them down or tripping them up, and ran their race with real endurance. Their story is meant to be an example, not a warning to avoid trusting God.

Two Kinds of Discipline

Hebrews 12 uses the word discipline, and it's worth slowing down on that word because it doesn't just mean punishment. Scripture actually describes two different kinds.

The first is discipline as a consequence. When you walk away from what's right, there are real outcomes that follow. Sin messes with relationships. It gets in the way of what you're meant to be doing with your life. When God corrects you here, He's not trying to crush you. He's confronting what's actually harmful and steering your heart back toward Him.

The second is discipline as preparation. Sometimes a hard season isn't connected to anything you did wrong. It's part of how God builds you for what's coming. Think about an athlete grinding through pre season training nobody sees, or someone training for a job that demands more of them than they've ever given before. The difficulty isn't punishment. It's what actually gets them ready.

Hebrews puts it plainly. Endure hardship as discipline. God disciplines the people He loves, not to wreck them, but to shape them into who they're meant to become.





Solomon's Prayer

Second Chronicles 6 and 7 back this up with a real story. When Solomon dedicates the temple, he prays with real humility. He knows God can't be boxed into a building, but he still asks God to make His presence known there.

Then Solomon does something interesting. He looks ahead and admits that God's people are going to fail. They'll sin. They'll face defeat, drought, and hard times. And every time he brings it up, he asks the same question. If your people turn back to you and pray, will you actually hear them?

God says yes. He fills the temple with His presence, and later tells Solomon plainly that there will be seasons of discipline ahead, moments when hardship touches the land. None of it random. All of it aimed at bringing His people back to Him.

What To Actually Do With Hardship

In 2 Chronicles 7, God lays out a clear response for when things get hard. It starts with humility, which is basically admitting you can't fix everything yourself and you actually need Him.

From there comes prayer. Instead of white knuckling through it alone, God wants you to actually bring it to Him. Then comes seeking His face, which isn't just asking Him to make the pain stop. It's asking Him what He's trying to show you, whether that's something that needs correcting, or a season that's actually preparing you for something bigger.

If there's sin involved, repentance is next. Repentance isn't just feeling bad about something. It's actually changing direction, and obedience is the proof that the change is real.

Then comes the promise. God hears from heaven. He forgives. He brings healing. The blessing comes from actually walking with Him through it, not from somehow dodging the hard stuff altogether.

The Pattern Running Through Psalm 107

Psalm 107 tells the same story a few different ways. Some people are wandering with no direction. Some are in trouble because of their own choices. Some are struggling for reasons that have nothing to do with anything they did wrong.

But every single time, the pattern's the same. They cry out to God in their trouble. He shows up and delivers them. And every time, the psalm circles back to the same line, giving thanks for His steadfast love.

The point isn't that hardship disappears the second you pray. It's that God shows up faithfully when His people actually turn to Him. Discipline isn't random. It's got a purpose, and His love is the ground it's all standing on.

The psalm actually ends with a challenge, and it's worth reading straight rather than paraphrasing. "Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things; let them consider the steadfast love of the LORD" (Psalm 107:43). Being wise here isn't about being clever. It's about actually noticing the pattern and letting it change how you handle your own hard seasons.



So What Now?

It's easy to write off a hard season as bad luck or just unfair. Scripture tells a different story. God's always working with intention, even when it doesn't feel like it. For some of you, a hard season is showing you something that needs to change. For others, it's preparing you for something you haven't got to yet, and it'd be a shame to waste it. Either way, the response is the same. Get honest. Pray. Ask Him what He's showing you. Walk it out.

God's discipline doesn't run forever without a reason. It lasts until it's actually done what it came to do. He's not trying to hold blessing back from you. He's leading you into it, the long way round sometimes, but leading you there all the same.

His steadfast love isn't threatened by any of this. It's actually the reason any of it exists in the first place. He corrects you and prepares you because He's genuinely devoted to you. He hasn't given up. He hasn't gone anywhere. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.

Let's Talk About It

Use these for a group discussion or as personal journalling prompts. Space is left below each question for writing.

Think of a hard season you've been through. Looking back, does it feel more like correction, preparation, or something you still can't quite explain?

When life gets hard, is your first move usually to try and fix it yourself, or to actually bring it to God? What would it look like to do the second one more often?

Is there something right now that God might be asking you to change direction on? What would real repentance, not just feeling bad, actually look like there?

What's one thing hard in your life right now that might actually be preparing you for something ahead, even if you can't see what that is yet?

How does knowing God's love doesn't leave when things get hard change the way you want to handle your next hard season?



SESSION SIX

What If You Don't Actually Have It Together?

Read Psalm 23

There's a well known modern rewrite of Psalm 23, first written in the 1960s by a Japanese pastor named Toki Miyashina. It follows the same shape as the original, line by line, except the shepherd gets replaced with something far more familiar to modern life. It opens with the line, "The clock is my dictator, I shall not rest."

From there it walks straight through the same structure as the original, except everything's flipped. Instead of green pastures, you're run ragged from task to task. Instead of being led beside quiet water, you're driven by deadlines and the constant need to prove yourself. Instead of a table prepared for you while your enemies look on, unable to touch you, the poem pictures headaches and an overflowing inbox sitting at the head of the table, running the show. And instead of goodness and mercy following you all your days, it's fatigue and pressure that trail you instead, right to the end.

It's uncomfortable to read because it's accurate. A lot of us are quietly living inside that version without ever realising there was another option on offer. Which is exactly why the real one is worth slowing down for.

"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 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. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Same shape as the other one. Completely different life underneath it. Centuries before Miyashina wrote his version, and centuries before Jesus said "I am the good shepherd" in John chapter ten, this psalm was already describing what it's actually like to be looked after, rather than run into the ground.

He Gives You What You Actually Need

A good shepherd makes sure his sheep are fed, rested, and looked after, not because they've worked it out themselves, but because he knows what they need better than they do.

Jesus says something similar in the Sermon on the Mount. Don't spend your life anxious about food or clothes, he says, because your Father already knows what you need. Seek him first and the rest falls into place behind that. A few verses later he adds that if we, who mess up plenty, still know how to give our kids good things, how much more will God give good things to the people who ask him. You don't have to carry the weight of providing for yourself. You've got a shepherd who already knows what you need before you've figured out how to ask.





He Leads You, Even Through The Scary Bits

A good shepherd doesn't just feed his sheep and disappear. He actually leads them, through the hard terrain as much as the easy parts. He goes ahead of them, and he stays with them the whole way.

This matters more than it sounds. You're not meant to work this out completely on your own, and you're never as alone in it as it feels. Hebrews says Jesus isn't some distant figure giving orders from somewhere safe and comfortable. He's been through it himself, tempted in every way we are, and came through without giving in. He can actually help, because he's walked the road first. And God's own promise in Hebrews 13 is blunt about it, he will never leave you and never give up on you.

He Protects You, Even From Yourself

Sheep are slow and defenceless, which makes them easy targets. So a shepherd carries two tools, a rod and a staff. The rod fought off whatever was trying to attack from outside. The staff, a hooked crook, was used to pull a sheep back when it wandered off somewhere dangerous on its own.

That second part is the uncomfortable bit. We usually assume that if God really loved us, he'd never let anything hard touch our lives, and definitely wouldn't correct us. This psalm says the opposite. Protecting you and disciplining you come from the exact same love. Hebrews puts it plainly, no discipline feels good while it's happening, but it produces something good afterward in the people who let it actually train them. A shepherd who never used the staff wouldn't be kinder. He'd just be watching you wander toward a cliff and saying nothing.

He Blesses You In Ways No Real Shepherd Would

The final lines drop the sheep and shepherd picture, but they don't drop the idea. In real life, a shepherd looks after his flock so that eventually he can shear it, or eat it. No actual shepherd throws his sheep a party. But that's exactly what happens here.

He gives you a kind of victory, a table prepared for you while your enemies look on. It's a picture of being seated and safe while whatever was against you is still standing right there, unable to touch you. Paul says something similar in Romans 8, that in Christ we come out the other side more than conquerors. However bad things look right now, evil doesn't get the final word.

He gives you honour, anointing your head with oil. Being anointed with oil was a sign of respect, not something handed out lightly. You might feel like you're just one more sheep in the flock, replaceable, unremarkable, but that's not how you're treated. It's the same instinct behind the story Jesus tells about the son who comes home after wasting everything, and the father runs to meet him, calls for the best robe, and throws a feast, because his son who was lost has come home. You're not defined by your worst moment. You're defined by how you're welcomed back.





He gives you steady devotion, goodness and mercy following you all the days of your life. This isn't a one off gesture. It's a promise that his loyalty tracks you for good, through every version of you, the put together one and the falling apart one. Even when you drift, he doesn't. There's an old image of God as a relentless pursuer, chasing people down even as they run from him. That's what's being described here. Nothing you've done has used up his patience with you.

Knowing, Trusting, And Actually Following

None of us follow this shepherd perfectly. Isaiah says we've all wandered off like sheep, each of us choosing our own way. Usually because we thought we knew better, or because once we'd drifted, coming back felt more embarrassing than staying gone.

But the better you actually know this shepherd, the easier trusting him gets. And the more you trust him, the easier it gets to actually follow him, not out of gritted teeth obedience, but because you believe he's got your good in mind. And the more you follow him, the more you end up knowing him. That whole loop, knowing, trusting, following, isn't a technique for improving yourself. It's just what the Bible calls faith.

Let's Talk About It

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Does being compared to a sheep feel accurate to you? Why or why not?



Out of provides, leads, protects, and blesses, which one do you need to hear most right now, and why?

Which one is hardest for you to actually believe? What makes it hard?

What might it look like for God to protect you from yourself, and why would that actually be a good thing?

What do you make of the idea that God's devotion to you doesn't run out? Where have you seen him stick with you when you didn't expect it?

