

House Group Studies

April to July 2010

Songs for Disciples **(some Psalms to savour)**

20th April - **Overview Meeting** for Leaders and
all who wish to come

4 th May	- Study 1	Psalm 23
18 th May	- Study 2	Psalm 32
1 st June	- Study 3	Psalm 51
15 th June	- Study 4	Psalm 103
6 th July	- Study 5	Psalm 121
20 th July	- Study 6	Psalm 139

Songs for Disciples

Two quotes

“The Psalter is a collection, an anthology, a hymnal, a book of songs. We might even think of it as a photograph album, full of pictures that show us a variety of places in a land of spiritual experience.”
(Michael Wilcox, 2001)

“The Psalms are wonderful. They have been read, repeated, chanted and sung, studied, wept over, rejoiced in, expounded, loved and praised by God’s people for thousands of years. Composed upon particular occasions yet designed for general use. [Composed] under the influence of Him to whom all hearts are known, and all events foreknown, they suit mankind in all situations” (William S Plumer, 1887)

This term we are going to study some of the most familiar psalms. They are songs for us – as disciples of the Lord Jesus. Psalms to savour; that is, to chew over and meditate on with other believers that we might trust, know and follow our Lord Jesus more. Although the psalms chosen may be familiar, they will reward careful study, **as if for the first time**. We will discover that simple observation of the text, with the help of the Holy Spirit who caused them to be penned, leads to discoveries that thrill, challenge and encourage – all to God’s praise.

It will be good - at some point in the evening – perhaps after the study - for the group to say the psalm together as an act of faith and praise.

It is always good to remember that “LORD” in capitals in the Old Testament refers to God the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Therefore all we read of the LORD is true of our Lord Jesus.

It is always good to ask early what the psalm teaches us about the Lord Jesus. That often opens up the psalm to us as disciples. In

each study there will be at least one New Testament reference which shows why the psalm is a song for disciples.

At the end of each study we will ask something like this: **What should/may we expect as a result of this psalm?**

This question may require some careful thought. The idea is that there may be something we can or should expect, either of the LORD, or in our experience as a disciple of the Lord Jesus. If a psalm is written to cover a certain experience the probability is that that we will, at some point, face that kind of experience and in that experience find the psalm helpful.

ENJOY!

Study 1 Psalm 23 – THE MOST SECURE RELATIONSHIP

4/5/10

Our familiarity with this psalm could be a hindrance if it stops us looking at its details with fresh eyes. **Pray** that the LORD would open our eyes to the riches this psalm has for us.

Read the Psalm out loud together – slowly. Think about where the emphasis should be.

As we consider the details of the Psalm we will seek to relate them to our position as disciples of the Lord Jesus.

1. What two things is the psalm describing?

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How do these two things relate to us as disciples of the Lord Jesus? –
see 1 Peter 2:25

2. How would you describe David's attitude as he writes/sings the psalm? – note especially verse 1 and 6 – but also the whole psalm.

3. List the things David says the LORD does as his Shepherd?

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How do these fit with "*I shall not be in want*" (1)?

What might they mean in practice for the disciple of the Lord Jesus?

4. Verses 1-3 David describes what it means to have the LORD as his Shepherd. In verses 4 and 5, he addresses the LORD. What confidence may we have in the face of death and enemies?

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How does verse 5 relate to the confidence of the LORD's provision in verse 1? How does that encourage us?

5. How might this psalm help us to come personally to say the "surely" of verse 6?

6. In what ways can you imagine the Lord Jesus finding this psalm helpful during His earthly ministry?

7. As you look back over life to date, are you able to share any situations where this psalm has been of particular help to you?

8. What expectations may we have of life and of the LORD as a result of this psalm?

Study 2 Psalm 32 – THE BEST OF BLESSINGS

18/5/10

Psalm 32 divides into 5 parts – as follows –

- v. 1 - 2 - a declaration about the best of blessings
- v. 3 – 5 - a testimony about this blessing
- v. 6 – 7 - a prayer of the LORD about the blessing
- v. 8 – 10 - the LORD’s message to the receiver of the blessing
- v. 11 - an instruction to all who receive the blessing.

Part 1 – 1-2

- What do these verses teach about forgiveness?

- What is the significance of “*and in whose spirit is no deceit*”? (see 1 John 1:8 – 10)

Part 2 – 3-5

- What experience is being described in verses 3 and 4?

- How does verse 5 link back to the last line of verse 2?

- What promise does the New Testament give assuring disciples that verse 5 can be our experience too? (see 1 John 1:9)

- What is the surprise of these words?

- What does or might keep us from confessing our sins to God?

Part 3 – 6-7

- What is the dominant picture in these verses?
(NB – mighty waters are a picture of God’s judgement against sin as in Noah and the flood.)
- What confidence does the experience of forgiveness bring for the future?

Part 4 – 8-10

- What is the promise?
- What is the warning?
- What is the encouragement?

Part 5 – 11

- Given that this psalm is about forgiveness, what does it mean to be “righteous” and “upright” in heart?

What may/should we expect as a result of this psalm?

- as disciples?
- of the Lord Jesus?

Study 3 Psalm 51 – LIP-OPENING MERCY 1/6/10

This psalm of confession is a precious gift from God to every disciple. Luther said “There is no other Psalm which is oftener sung or prayed in the Church.” According to William Plumer it is often and fitly called THE SINNER’S GUIDE.

The heading tells us the background, which can be found in 2 Samuel 11.

1. From verses 1 & 2 **list** the words used to describe sin and **consider** what they each mean?

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2. According to verses 3 to 6 what does true confession involve?

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Why are we so slow to confess our sins specifically?

How can we cultivate a more realistic view of our daily sinfulness?

3. To what does David’s faith in the LORD’s mercy and unfailing love lead, according to verses 7 – 12?

- 7-9 –

(N.B. – see John 19:29 to discover how this section links to Jesus. Hyssop had a key role in the Passover (Exodus 12:22) and the cleansing of someone from an infectious skin disease(Leviticus 14)

- 10-12

4. Notice the “then” at the start of verse 13. What is its significance?

Why is unconfessed sin such a handicap to witness and service?

5. From verses 13-19 what is the evidence of a purified heart, renewed spirit and restored joy?

SO – What may/should we expect as a result of this psalm?

- as disciples?

- of the Lord Jesus?

Study 4 Psalm 103 - TALK TO YOURSELF ABOUT THE LORD 15/6/10

In Scripture, talking to yourself is a sign of wisdom, not madness. It is something we need to learn to do: to speak to our souls about the LORD.

Read the Psalm

We have all sung Psalm 103. "Praise my soul the King of heaven." is a version of it.

The Psalm starts and ends with the same phrase: "*Praise the LORD, O my soul*". In Hebrew poetry this suggests that the key thought will be the middle statement of the psalm. This is found in verse 11. "*For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is the LORD's love for those who fear Him.*"

This suggests that **the key question** to ask is: **What does this psalm teach us about talking to ourselves about the LORD's great love for us?**

SECTION 1 – read verses 1 to 5 again

- what do these verses say the LORD does for our souls?
- how are these benefits fulfilled in the Lord Jesus?

SECTION 2 – read verses 6 to 10 again

- what do these verses tell us about the LORD's work in history?
- how does the story recounted briefly in these verses relate to the story of every disciple?

SECTION 3 – read verses 11 to 14 again

- what do these verses tell us about the way the LORD deals with us?

- How does Ephesians 3:17-19 throw light on verses 11 & 12?
- How do verses 13 & 14 help us understand what Jesus means when He says we should pray “*Our Father in heaven ...*”?

SECTION 4 – read verses 15 to 18 again

- According to these verses how does the LORD differ from us?
- How will remembering this affect our lives?
- How does the gospel of the Lord Jesus help us understand v. 17 & 18? (c.f. Romans 8:38-39)

SECTION 5 – read verses 19 to 22 again

- What do these verses tell us about the LORD and how all should respond to Him?
- How should we pray as a result of these verses?

Imagine a normal day: how do you think the LORD would want you to use this psalm, and what do you think the result might be?

What should/may we expect as a result of this psalm?

Study 5 Psalm 121 - HELP FOR THE JOURNEY 6/7/10

As a “song of ascents” this was a song sung together by pilgrims on their journey up to Jerusalem. Jesus would have sung it as He made His way there as a child and then as He made His way to His death on the cross.

SOMETHING TO NOTICE: The difference between verses 1&2 and the rest of the psalm.

In verses 1 & 2 the psalmist speaks of “*my* eyes” and “*my* help”. The rest of the psalm speaks of “*your*” and “*you*”.

What does this mean? It could be that the psalmist is speaking to himself – as in Psalm 103,

OR – it could be that the psalm records the conversation between four travellers on their way up to Jerusalem.

Traveller 1 says 1& 2

Traveller 2 – replies encouragingly by verses 3 & 4

Traveller 3 – adds to the encouragement – verses 5 & 6

Traveller 4 – adds his in verses 7 & 8.

Suggestion: read it like that, with four readers?

- If this idea has any merit, what might it teach us about the kind of fellowship we need on our journey towards the New Jerusalem?

- Chew over verse 2. What kind of statement is this?
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- Why do you think the Psalmist refers to the LORD as the Maker of heaven and earth?

Study 6 Psalm 139 - PRECIOUS THOUGHTS

20/7/10

Before we look at the detail of the psalm – please read it through asking this question: **what clues are there in the psalm as to the circumstances of David when he wrote it?**

- In what way could our circumstances be described similarly?

It will help to keep those circumstances in mind as we now study the psalm.

THE LORD KNOWS ME (1-6) – He sees everything.

- List what the LORD knows.
- Think of times when people discovered that Jesus knew everything about them. – e.g. – John 4:29; John 2:48; Mark 1:8
- Given the circumstances in which David wrote, in what ways would these thoughts be helpful to him?

THE LORD IS WITH ME (7-12) – He is ever present

- How is the extent of the LORD's omnipresence (being everywhere) described?
- What confidence does this give us as we think of being surrounded by those who are in rebellion against God? What New Testament promise gives us the same confidence? (*Matthew 28:20 & Hebrews 13:5*)

THE LORD MADE ME (13-16) – He wrote every page of life

- How does this section help us to look at our bodies and our circumstances?

- What encouragement does this give to us?

THE LORD THRILLS ME (17-18) – There is more to discover of Him every day

- Think about the word “precious”. How will it show if thoughts of the LORD are precious to us?
- What is suggested by the words “When I awake I am still with you.?”

THE LORD LEADS ME (19-24) – I want Him to search every part of my life

- Why do we find verses 19 to 22 hard?
- One commentator helpfully says “For all its vehemence, the hatred in this passage is not spite, but zeal for God.” How do David’s words in this section flow from the section before?
- How do the words of verses 23-24 show that David is not sitting in self-righteous judgement upon the wicked? How does David’s prayer fit with the call of Jesus to take up our cross and follow Him daily?

What should/can we expect as a result of this psalm as disciples of the Lord Jesus?