

LifeWay

YOU



**WHEN
EMOTIONS
RISE**

+ + +

**SPIRITUAL
DISCIPLINES:**
BECOMING MORE
LIKE JESUS

GOD'S UNFAILING PROMISE

+ + +

We've messed up. You have. I have. We all have. And no matter how good our intentions or efforts are, we can't make up for the wrong we've done.

The Bible uses a much stronger word—sin—to describe how we have failed to live according to God's perfect standard (Rom. 3:23). The result of our sin is death (Rom. 6:23).

Thankfully, we do not have to stay in this condemned state. In spite of our sin and rebellion against God, He loves us and made a way for us to be forgiven and receive a new, eternal life, freed from the consequences of our sin. That way is Jesus Christ, who paid the penalty of our sin and brokenness with His own death (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). When we turn away from our sin in repentance and turn to Christ in faith, He gives us a new life, freed from the penalty of sin. We are made new in Him (2 Cor. 5:17).

God's unfailing promise—His commitment to us—is the best guarantee we can be offered. "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13).

To receive a new life in Christ, you can pray a prayer like this:

"Dear God, I know I am a sinner. I believe Jesus died on the cross to forgive me of my sins and rose from the dead to give me new life. I'm sorry for all the wrong I've done and ask You to forgive me. I now accept Your gift of eternal life. Thank You for Your love, forgiveness, and a new life in Jesus Christ. From this day forward, I choose to follow You. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Share your decision to follow Jesus with a pastor or those in your Bible study group. Be baptized as an expression of your faith. Get involved in a church that will help you grow in your faith.

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ON THE COVER

Blake works as an operating manager at KetoBakes.com. But he is definitely not defined by his job. He and his wife Ashton want the way they live and the work they do for Jesus Christ to be evident above all else. He loves the Lord and is passionately striving to know Christ in his own life and also make Him known to others. Blake and his wife aspire to include the transformation power of Christ and the gospel in every area of their lives, whether serving in church ministries or taking a stand for racial equality. He has future plans that include owning a coffee shop with a gym attached, having a fitness clothing line, and serving others through itinerant ministry. Toward his goal in business, he is currently working on the development of a fitness web page. These days his attention is also focused on building a strong and solid Christian foundation for a family. When he has free time, it is spent weightlifting, reading, hiking with his wife, playing video games, and participating in worship nights at his home with friends. Blake and Ashton are members at Grace Center Church in Franklin, Tenn.



WINTER 2020-21 + + + Vol. 13 No. 2

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Printed in the United States of America

YOU (ISSN 1943-6230, Item 005030553) is published quarterly by LifeWay Christian Resources, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234, Ben Mandrell, President. © 2020 LifeWay Christian Resources. For ordering or inquiries, visit lifeway.com, or write LifeWay Resources Customer Service, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234-0113. For bulk shipments mailed quarterly to one address, email orderentry@lifeway.com, fax 615-251-5933, or write to the above address. We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review LifeWay's doctrinal guideline, please visit www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers. NOTE: Some Internet addresses given in this periodical are outside the LifeWay Internet domain. At the time of this posting, the specific pages mentioned were viewed and approved by LifeWay editorial staff. Because information on these pages may have changed by the time of your viewing, the LifeWay editorial staff cannot be held responsible for content on pages outside their control. Specific page addresses referenced in this periodical possibly may link to inappropriate material.



EDITORIAL

MARK CROSTON

I am so excited when we get to gather in small groups to study the Word of God. Traditionally we only think of six emotions—happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise and disgust—but a recent study reports there are twenty-seven different human emotions¹, and excited is on that list. There are some people who think we should all be stoic, but our emotions are God-given. In fact, the Bible often tells of the emotions of God. Our emotions help us to celebrate the highs and navigate the lows in life. Without them life would be stale and boring.

After our study on emotions we will take some time to dig into our need to practice healthy spiritual disciplines. These two studies together remind us that successful Christian living is emotional, but is also guided within the consistent practice of spiritual disciplines.

COVID-19 did not allow us to gather in the Summer of 2020, but make your plans now to join us at the Black Church Leadership and Family Conference. This all-in-one, energizing week is July 19-23, 2021. I'm sure this year will feel like a family reunion.

Learn more at www.lifeway.com/blackchurchlife. There is a full program for every member of the family!

Thanks for joining me in this season of study. Grab your Bible and allow God to speak through YOU!

Be Blessed!

Dr. Mark A. Croston Sr.

YOU General Editor

Director of Black Church Ministries

www.lifeway.com/BlackChurchLife

¹ Bruce Y. Lee, "Here are the 27 Different Human Emotions, According to a Study, Forbes, September 9, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brucelee/2017/09/09/here-are-the-27-different-human-emotions-according-to-a-study/#1bb348611335>



GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOU

YOU is a three-in-one learner and leader resource with inspirational and educational features to enhance Bible study that leads to spiritual maturity and life change. Here is information to help you get the most out of *YOU*.

LEARNER PAGES

The first half of *YOU* includes pages for personal study. These should be read by the learner and leader prior to group time. Included in each session:

Memory Verses encourage filling the mind with the Word of God to strengthen every aspect of spiritual life.

Digging Deeper provides a deeper look at a word, character, or other aspect from the session.

Did You Know? provides an African-American or urban historical fact or update connected to the session.

DAILY READINGS

Included with each session are five devotionals to be read by the learner and leader. The benefits of a daily devotion are innumerable. Their primary purpose in this resource is to focus attention on the biblical content of each session for application of and conformity to the Word of God.

LEADER PAGES

The second half of *YOU* includes pages to guide teaching each session. Leaders can use the leader pages to guide learners through the passage and its key emphases as detailed on the learner pages. Here are suggestions on how to teach:

Prior to the session, read and study the Bible passage, keywords, and learner pages.

Plan teaching using the leader pages. Keep in mind that because of time, it may not be possible to use every teaching suggestion. Also the teaching suggestions are in sequential order for easy use.

Features to use when teaching include: The Point, which is readily recognizable on the learner and leader pages; the question at the top of the first page of each learner session; Keywords on the Scripture pages; “Object Lessons”; “Digging Deeper”; “Did You Know?”; Pack Items*; and Commentary at the end of each session on leader pages. Refine your teaching plans when necessary.

PRAY

Because the Holy Spirit is the guide for your study, invite Him to show you how to “rightly divide the word of truth” as you teach your group. Read the Bible passage several times, asking the Holy Spirit to show you its meaning and application.

* PACK ITEMS

These are posters, charts, and handouts that can provide another layer to your teaching and add needed variety that makes learning more interesting. The *YOU* Leader Pack is located at lifeway.com.



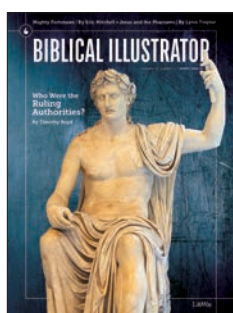
FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO GO DEEPER



The **Advanced Bible Study** is written for group members who desire more extensive commentary. It includes exposition of each session's Scripture passage, an examination of keywords, an introduction to the setting of the passage and biblical life and times, questions to guide the study, and interactive responses to help readers apply God's truths to their lives today.



The **Herschel Hobbs Commentary** is designed specifically for leaders and provides a comprehensive exposition of each session's Scripture passage. Specific attention is called to items in the biblical text that readers would miss without a commentary. This commentary is based on the King James Version but interacts with all major English translations.



Each quarter, **Biblical Illustrator** offers in-depth background information on Bible customs, history, culture, archaeology, and word studies through vivid photography, engaging maps and graphics, and lesson-targeted articles. You can subscribe to *Biblical Illustrator* by going to lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator or by calling 1-800-458-2772. Forty additional articles (in PDF form) that support this quarter's Bible studies are available at lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator.



Social Media: Connect with a community of *YOU* users.

Post responses to questions, share teaching ideas, and link to great blog content. [Facebook.com/YOUbiblestudy](https://www.facebook.com/YOUbiblestudy)

For more about *YOU* go to www.lifeway.com/YOU

YOU DISCIPLESHIP PLAN

The Pathway of Discipleship

Growing in Christ is a journey—a lifelong journey—but what does that look like? LifeWay’s research reveals eight signposts that indicate believers are on the discipleship pathway that leads to spiritual maturity. Each year, *YOU* engages all eight of these areas. Following this intentional plan for discipleship ensures progress on the pathway to becoming more like Christ.

Visit Lifeway.com/YOU for a fuller picture of this discipleship plan through 2022.

8 SIGNPOSTS	Fall 2020	Winter 2020-21	Spring 2021	Summer 2021
Build Relationships	After God’s Own Heart			
Seek God	All In: A Life of Commitment			
Obey God and Deny Self		When Emotions Rise		
Engage with Scripture		Spiritual Disciplines: Becoming More Like Jesus		
Exercise Faith			Essentials of Christianity	
Share Christ			How to Share Christ	
Live Unashamed				The Church God Desires
Serve God and Others				Elijah: Living Outside the Comfort Zone

STUDY 1 WHEN EMOTIONS RISE

HOW THIS STUDY FITS YOUR'S DISCIPLESHIP PLAN

+ + +

OBEY GOD AND DENY SELF.

Denying self means we do not let our emotions run wild and unchecked. As we look to God in obedience and trust, those things that might trigger our emotions in an unhealthy way are kept in proper perspective.

Writer Bio

Lynn Pryor

is the Team Leader for *Bible Studies for Life* at LifeWay. He and his wife, Mary, are Texans who have made Tennessee their home for twenty-seven years. You can read his weekly devotions related to this study at LynnHPryor.com.

Maina Mwaura

adapted this unit for the *YOU* audience. He lives in the Atlanta area with his wife Tiffiney and seven-year-old daughter Zyan. If you would like to find out more about his work, check him out at mainaspeaks.com.



A BIBLE STUDY ABOUT TAKING CONTROL OF OUR EMOTIONS

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This is not a study on the Book of Psalms, but this study captures the heart of the writers of the psalms. The emotions they capture find expression in many circumstances of our lives. These emotions rose out of prosperity, adversity, defeat, and victory and include grief, anger, joy, worry, fear, and depression. This study guides us in understanding how to direct our feelings toward God, just as the psalmists did.

Emotions, good or bad, should not go unchecked. Like the psalmist, we also deal with grief, anger, joy, worry, fear, and depression. This study will help us to gain the power we need to prevent these emotions from taking over our lives.

Probably, the most difficult emotion to deal with is grief. We lose family and friends to death. We lose spouses through death or divorce. We lose our health. We lose friendships for various reasons. We lose jobs. These losses cause us to grieve deeply.

Anger is another emotion that may be hard to deal with and control. Anger can destroy our relationships, affect our personalities, damage how we are perceived, and change how we feel about ourselves.

The emotion that is a keeper on our list is joy. When one thinks of joy, happiness or the absence of sadness may come to mind. Happiness is based on circumstances, but joy that is discussed in the Bible is a state of emotional well-being.

The emotions of worry, fear, and depression will be dealt with separately in this study but can be considered together. Each one has the same outcome when allowed to rule our lives. We become less than God's desire for us. God has a higher purpose for His people, so He is faithful to help us take control of our emotions. Plus He uses our most painful times to draw us closer to Him.

WALKING IN GRIEF

THE POINT:
GOD RESPONDS
TO OUR CRIES
WITH GRACE AND
COMPASSION.

PSALM /// 116:1-9,15-17

¹ I love the LORD because he has heard my appeal for mercy.
² Because he has turned his ear to me, I will call out to him as long as I live. ³ The ropes of death were wrapped around me, and the torments of Sheol overcame me; I encountered trouble and sorrow. ⁴ Then I called on the name of the LORD: "LORD, save me!"

MEMORY VERSE

⁵ **The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is compassionate.**
⁶ **The LORD guards the inexperienced; I was helpless, and he saved me.** ⁷ Return to your rest, my soul, for the LORD has been good to you. ⁸ For you, LORD, rescued me from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling. ⁹ I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living.

¹⁵ The death of his faithful ones is valuable in the LORD's sight.
¹⁶ LORD, I am indeed your servant; I am your servant, the son of your female servant. You have loosened my bonds. ¹⁷ I will offer you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the LORD.

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KEYWORDS

a. The torments of Sheol (v. 3)
– Sheol in the Old Testament refers to the place of the dead. It's often translated "grave," and was understood to be a place of darkness.

HOW CAN WE BE RESTORED WHEN WE ARE EXPERIENCING SORROW?

In the 1996 Christmas movie, *The Preacher's Wife*, starring Courtney B. Vance, Whitney Houston, and Denzel Washington, Rev. Henry Biggs grieves at the prospect of losing his poverty-stricken church. It's a movie that always makes my wife cry and puts a few tears in my own eyes. Not only is Rev. Biggs feeling angst about the African-American Baptist Church where he pastors, he is stressed because of a decline in membership, financial difficulties, and the pressure he is receiving from real estate developer Joe Hamilton to sell his church. These issues cause him to isolate himself from his wife, Julia, and his young son, Jeremiah.

But the preacher recognized to whom he should ask for help. He called on God, and God sent him an angel named Dudley in response.

This movie exemplifies the reality that Christmas isn't always joyful and exciting. There can be problems and grief that dampen spirits and hearts. But the writer of Psalms 116 shows that God restores us with His grace and compassion.

Call on God // Psalm 116:1-4

The writer of this psalm experienced great distress and a threat to his life. Whether he faced a near-death experience or encountered severe persecution, the things the psalmist learned of God and his subsequent responses are helpful to us in a variety of situations and emotions.

WHAT MIGHT KEEP US FROM TAKING OUR SORROWS TO GOD?

God hears our prayers—and He responds! The psalmist's trust-filled psalm shows us that God heard and responded when he was in a deeply distressing situation. Without knowing the specifics of what the psalmist was facing, we see a vivid image of his plight: "The ropes of death were wrapped around me, and the torments of Sheol overcame me." In the Old Testament, Sheol was the place of the dead. Some want to equate Sheol with the New Testament description of hell, and while some passages refer to the wicked going to Sheol



THE POINT: GOD RESPONDS TO OUR CRIES WITH GRACE AND COMPASSION.

(Num. 16:30; Ps. 9:17), it can refer to what is common to all humanity: death and the grave (Gen. 37:35; Ps. 16:10). The psalmist appeared to be at death's door.

WHAT TRUTHS ABOUT GOD HELP YOU DURING TIMES OF SORROW?

When grief finds us, we can feel overwhelmed. We experience loss, and we might wonder how we can live or survive without the thing we've lost, whether it's a loved one, a career, or something else we loved and relied on. In those moments, an internal pep talk will not suffice. In those moments, the words of well-meaning individuals who try to boost us up with "Buck up, little buddy" or "This'll pass" sound hollow or empty. In those moments, the only solution is to call on God, the One who hears our call and responds in His love.

Rest in God // Psalm 116:5-9

The psalmist knew he could call on God to rescue him because he knew the character of the One he called on.

- **God is gracious.** Unfortunately, we often limit grace to the New Testament. Grace is certainly a strong message in the New Testament because it was through the death of Christ on our behalf that we experience His grace. But grace is also seen in the Old Testament! Isaiah said, "Therefore the LORD is waiting to show you mercy, and is rising up to show you compassion, for the LORD is a just God. All who wait patiently for him are happy" (Isa. 30:18).
- **God is righteous.** The root of the word righteous originally meant to be straight; it is the standard. Therefore, someone who is righteous conforms to an ethical and moral standard. No one conforms to this standard like God does. He always does what is just and right.
- **God is compassionate.** The Hebrew word for *compassion* and *mercy* is tied to deep love, such as a love a superior has for an inferior. "As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him" (Ps. 103:13). This is what parents feel for their children. And, of course, this aptly describes God's character, but His mercy and compassion toward us far exceeds any human parent's affection.



DIGGING DEEPER PRECIOUS IN DEATH

Psalm 116:15 is often used in Christian funeral services. It reminds us our God is faithful to us in life, but also faithful in death. The psalmist declared God would show compassion when death came. The Lord's omniscience (all-knowing nature) means He not only sees the struggles of His people, but He knows the moment of each one's death. He promises to accompany the righteous to the place of the dead. Though the psalmist didn't have the benefit of New Testament hope through the resurrection of Jesus, he did state his assurance that a compassionate God would continue to prove faithful.

How does Psalm 116:15 provide insight to your understanding of death and grief?



HOW CAN AN UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S CHARACTER HELP US MOVE THROUGH GRIEF?

When we trust in God to rescue us through His gracious care and compassion, we can also rest. We do not need to worry or fret. We do not need to keep repeating the chorus: My life is over. I see no way forward. My grief is so deep I'm immobilized. When we trust God to work, we can rest confidently that He is with us and He will strengthen us.

HOW IS GOD GOOD TO YOU EVEN WHEN WHAT'S HAPPENING AROUND YOU IS NOT GOOD?

This attitude was no wishful thinking on the psalmist's part. He knew firsthand how the Lord had been good to him and rescued him. When we feel the despairing effects of grief, we should remember the testimony of this psalmist.

- When you feel like your life is over, it is the Lord who rescues "me from death."
- When you feel immobilized by your grief, remember the Lord who rescues "my feet from stumbling."

At one time or another we all experience grief. We will only feel overwhelmed in our grief when we fail to trust God.

Trust in God // Psalm 116:15-17

It's said that right before Harriet Tubman died, she spoke about God and heaven frequently. It's something that some historians say she was ready for. We know that she lived a life greatly depended on God. Trust in God would need to be a primary factor for anyone who lived the kind of life that she lived.

WHAT ARE SOME BENEFITS OF TRUSTING GOD DURING DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES?

At first glance, verse 15 seems contradictory to other passages in the Bible. God told Ezekiel, "For I take no pleasure in anyone's death" (Ezek. 18:32). God does not want "any to perish" (2 Pet. 3:9), yet we read in this psalm that "the death of his faithful ones is valuable in the LORD's sight." The contexts of the passages in Ezekiel and 2 Peter point to God's desire for all to come to Him in repentance before death.

The psalmist, however, was talking about the death of God's children—"his faithful ones." Some scholars interpret valuable in the sense of "costly." In other words, it is costly and grievous to God that the praise of His children is silenced through death; therefore, He steps in and rescues them from death.

THE POINT: GOD RESPONDS TO OUR CRIES WITH GRACE AND COMPASSION.

WHAT HELPS YOU TRUST GOD DURING DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES?

God cares for us deeply, even in our last days on earth. God also sees death differently than we do; we tend to focus on life on this earth—the here and now—but God has an eternal perspective. He knows that death is not the end; in fact, believers are never more alive than when they enter Christ’s presence for eternity! Because of the death and resurrection of Christ, death is not a tragedy for His followers; it is a triumph!

In life or death, the psalmist knew he was loved and valued by God. Therefore, he would continue to serve God. The Lord had “loosened my bonds,” and he was once again free to serve Him. As God’s servant, the psalmist would offer a “thanksgiving sacrifice” and “call on the name of the LORD.”

Admittedly, it can be hard to feel thankful in the midst of circumstances that cause us grief, but it’s in those very moments that we need to remember God and all He has done for us in Christ.

DID YOU KNOW?

The African-American experience included untimely deaths from mortality-plagued transatlantic voyages as well as from the violence of forced labor. Because of these unnecessary deaths, funeral ceremonies were a central rite in slave communities. They also formed the foundation of the black church tradition. Black funerals are distinctive from other funerals in American culture. First, these Christian ceremonies are often called homegoings. During the service bodies are typically viewed in a richly adorned open casket with large floral arrangements and ornate fabrics. There are usually limousines and nice cars to escort families. Historically, homegoings offered black Americans the respect in death that they didn’t always receive in life. A family in mourning could be comforted and understood away from a racist world. Mourners could feel at home despite the sorrow of the moment.¹

WHAT IMPACT DID THE WAY OF DEATH OF AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN HAVE ON THE WAY THEY GRIEVED?

LIVE IT

How does God respond to our cries during times of grief?

Let us not forget that God is always near, even during our darkest hour. We may become angry or feel abandoned because of the death of a loved one. But believers are precious to God, and He will hear us when we call out to Him. Let this truth provide comfort and rest during times of sorrow and distress. Through our lives, God has been good, and death will never change His goodness to us.

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- If you’re in a season of grief or sorrow, pray. Talk to God about what you’re experiencing and feeling.
- Make a list of all the ways God has shown you grace and compassion. When difficulties arise, pull out that list and reflect on the ways God has worked in your life. Trust God to continue working in your life.
- If you have a friend or relative going through grief, invest time to sit with him. You don’t have to offer advice or try to talk them out of their grief. Just sit, listen, and be the presence of Christ.

DAILY READINGS

1. OK TO CRY // PSALM 116:1

Crying is a very real emotion. Whether the psalmist cried tears of sorrow or whether the word “cry” was an expression of sorrow does not matter. The point is that he experienced grief. The Bible makes it clear that it’s natural to cry in times of grief—even Jesus cried because of the sorrow expressed for His dear friend, Lazarus (John 11:35). Because Jesus showed emotion, we should never be afraid to reveal our true emotions. It’s OK to cry at the loss of a loved one.

During times of grief and sorrow remember God is standing by, listening for your call.

2. GOD HEARS // PSALM 116:2

The psalmist made clear in this chapter that he loved God. The reason He loved God so much was because God heard his cry during times of suffering. Nothing so delights the human heart like the realization that our almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth, has personally heard the distressed cry of one of His children. For one not to love such a merciful and compassionate God would define a cold, unemotional heart. God’s ear “is not too deaf to hear” (Isa. 59:1).

God is interested in what we’re going through; just call to Him. He can hear us just fine.

3. CALL ON GOD // ISAIAH 65:24

During the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season, it may be hard to get away and seek the face of God. Everyone is distracted by seasonal shopping, decorations, and events. But as Christ-followers, we must remain focused on the One about whom we celebrate. We must remember too that our God is never too busy for us. He has promised that His presence will forever be with us. Because He is near, He wants us to call on Him in any season, good or bad, during times of happiness or grief.

Just call on Him. He will answer, because He is listening.

4. DO NOT FEAR // ISAIAH 41:10

What scares you? We’ve all had childhood fears—bugs or monsters under our beds. Because of exposure to the media, kids today as well as adults fear bigger phenomenon such as natural disasters and mass shootings. Basically, our fears are rooted in one overall fear—we are afraid to die. God made us and understands the fear in our hearts. Through the prophet Isaiah, He spoke words of encouragement to the Israelites, telling them “do not fear.” God wanted them (and us) to know that when life turns upside down, we can trust that He will still be God. He wants us to understand He has a solution for whatever we may be going through both now and in the future.

Just remember God’s words, “I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you.”

5. GOD’S SHIELD // ISAIAH 43:2

The word *shield* as a noun is a broad, sustainable material such as metal that protects a person from harm. It is a wartime piece of equipment used by soldiers in battle. Though we are not enduring a war, we struggle as if we were. Sometimes life can be so overwhelming that we feel we could go “insane,” if we had to endure “just one more thing.” God knows our struggles. Just as He assured the Israelites when they were pressed into exile, He assures us that He will never let go. Remember how He brought you through sickness, loss, and other adversities of the past. His strong shield of protection would not allow you to sink; instead, He taught you to swim. Meditate on this verse, allowing it to take root in your heart, so you will remember that God will not allow you to be swept away or burned.

God is our shield of protection and nothing can overcome His power. Do not fear.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

Know your audience

The holidays are an especially difficult time of year for those who have lost loved ones. The timing of this lesson could be very helpful in acknowledging this reality at a time when grief is easily overlooked. Take time to consider the individuals in your class. Make a phone call or send a note, letting them know you'll be praying for them during the holidays.

Look ahead

If your church has an abbreviated schedule around Christmas and New Year's, your class might not meet on one or more Sundays. In that case, you might feel the need to combine lessons at some point in this unit. Think about your learners and which topics need the most emphasis. Consider taking a poll and making your decisions based on their needs.

LOOK BACK

Remind learners that last week's lesson focused on the reality that God desires all people to hear and respond to the gospel. As followers of Jesus, we are called join in the Father's mission. Therefore, we should be ready to share the gospel. Encourage volunteers to briefly share their story.

TEACHING PLAN

INTRODUCTION

Prior to class, write on index cards common scenarios that we all experience during the holiday season (examples: visiting family, shopping, traffic). Call on volunteers one at a time to display their cards. Invite learners to state the natural response people have to these situations. Point out that all of these responses weren't necessarily bad. It's natural to be excited to visit family, but it's also natural that our patience gets tested by traffic. Explain that in this series of lessons, we will be

exploring the emotions that rise to the surface in all of us at times.

PACK ITEM: Review “**Pack Item 1: Walking in Grief**” poster with learners to identify the six sessions in this study.

TRANSITION: Read **The Point: “God responds to our cries with grace and compassion.”** and **The Question: “How can we be restored when we are experiencing sorrow?”** to transition into the lesson.

DIG INTO THE TEXT

Call on God // Psalm 116:1-4

GUIDE: Before beginning, point out that grief is a natural emotion we all feel at times—especially during the holidays. Remind learners that grief isn't something to be ashamed of; it isn't wrong in any way. It's the natural response to the loss of something or someone that we love. Note that grief can be devastating when we're unable to move beyond it, but grief can be healthy when it's balanced with hope and trust in God.

READ: As you read aloud Psalm 116 in its entirety, ask learners to look for ways in which this psalmist was dealing with sorrow.

PACK ITEM: Distribute **Pack Item 2: “Book of Psalms”** handout and review with learners. Share that many psalms reveal the deep and varied emotions of Christ-followers who sought to follow and worship God.

ASK: Focusing on verses 1-4, ask learners to identify what the psalmist seemed to be most grateful for in his grief.

OBJECT LESSON: Use the “Object Lesson” (p. 104) to illustrate how God hears us and responds to us in our times of grief.

DISCUSS: Invite learners to share what we might find ourselves praying for when we are grief-stricken. Discuss how God's answer might come in forms other than an audible voice (a Bible passage, a caring friend, a timely sermon, an uplifting song, a

THE POINT: GOD RESPONDS TO OUR CRIES WITH GRACE AND COMPASSION.

specific answered prayer). Talk together about how we can be sure to recognize His answers in the midst of our sorrow.

GUIDE: Use the commentary for verse 3 (p. 104) to highlight how the psalmist described someone entangled by sorrow, yet how the Lord graciously rescued him. Invite learners to share examples of how the Lord has rescued them from sorrow.

DID YOU KNOW?: Use “Did You Know?” (p. 15) to discuss the uniqueness of African-American funerals. Discuss the question that follows.

EXPLAIN: Point out that because of the psalmist’s experience with the Lord’s attentive care, he knew that he could call on Him again and again. Remind learners that there is no limit to God’s willingness, availability, or care for us. We can call to Him again and again for needs both small and great.

Rest in God // Psalm 116:5-9

READ: Invite learners to read Psalm 116:5-9 silently. While reading, ask them to look for descriptive words that communicate God’s nature.

DISCUSS: After reading, ask learners to share their observations aloud. As they respond, write their answers on the board (examples: The Lord is: gracious, righteous, compassionate). Then ask learners to identify action verbs that show what God did in response to the psalmist’s prayer (examples: The Lord guards, saves, rescues).

GUIDE: Use the commentary for verses 6-9 (p. 105) to explain that we don’t always experience God’s compassion through Him eliminating the storms in our lives; at times we understand His compassion by the ways in which He protects us in the midst of our storms.

SUMMARIZE: Refer to the paragraph that begins “The psalmist knew . . .” (p. 13) and the three subsequent paragraphs to highlight the meanings of “gracious,” “righteous,” and “compassionate.” Share about a time of sorrow or loss when you experienced God’s compassion.

ASK: “Why did the psalmist instruct his own soul to return to resting in the Lord?” Discuss

how reminders of God’s character help us to rest. Use the commentary for verse 9 (p. 105) to point out that resting in the Lord involves walking in obedience to the Lord.

Trust in God // Psalm 116:15-17

DISCUSS: Invite learners to turn to a neighbor and talk about the most valuable family item they possess. Point out that the item may have monetary value, or it may have sentimental value (like a family Bible or photo). Invite learners to share aloud.

ASK: “What causes something to have value or meaning for us?”

READ: Invite a learner to reread Psalm 116:15-17.

GUIDE: Draw learners’ attention to verse 15. Discuss why the death of believers is valuable to the Lord. Use the commentary (p. 105) to provide insight. Emphasize the fact that our darkest moments are known by God, seen by God, and are significant to God. They are precious to Him.

DIGGING DEEPER: Use “Digging Deeper” (p. 13) to remind learners that for the Christian, even the darkest days of death are filled with hope and the promise of new and eternal life. Ask the question that follows.

GUIDE: Draw learners’ attention to the verb tense in the psalm. Explain that most of verses 1-11 is in the past tense; however, most of verses 12-19 is in the future tense. Ask learners to discuss what we can infer from the verb change in our darkest hours. Point out that our times of grief and sorrow do not last forever. Note that the psalmist indicates how he will worship the Lord again.

DISCUSS: Point out that the psalmist is glad to serve the Lord because it was the Lord who had rescued him. Ask learners to share how the Lord’s comfort in past times of grief has led them to have a more faithful and thankful attitude of service.

CLOSE THE SESSION

Seasons of grief can shift our focus from sharing the gospel with others to caring for personal needs.

Believers should not feel guilty for experiencing grief. Instead, as we experience God's restorative grace and compassion, we will recognize anew the wonder of His love and the depth of His care.

PACK ITEM: Distribute **Pack Item 3: "Responding to Grief"** handout. Lead learners to write down how to respond to grief. Invite them to apply "Live It" (p. 15) to their lives this week.

PRAY: Allow enough time at the end of the session to briefly share any grief or sorrow learners are experiencing. Invite volunteers to pray aloud. Close in prayer by asking God to comfort us in the ways that only He can as we are experiencing loss.

OBJECT LESSON

Obtain two cans and a string and bring to class.

Display the classic childhood toy phone: two cans and a string.

ASK: "How did you pretend with simple toys like this phone?" Note that with this toy, there was joy in knowing someone was listening and that they would respond.

EXPLAIN: Point out that while phone technology has changed drastically in our lifetime, we still find comfort in knowing that someone is listening. Explain that when we grieve the loss of a loved one, we long to know that God is listening and that He hears us and will respond. Connect this object to the experience of the psalmist in verses 1-4.

ASK: "What did the psalmist say to God in his time of need? How did God respond?"



COMMENTARY

PSALM 116:1-4

Verse 1. The psalmist expressed his love for God because of God's nearness in his time of trouble. The psalmist knew trouble, cried to the Lord, and knew he was heard. The psalmist had the assurance God heard his cry for mercy and would respond. Perhaps written "after the fact," he reflected on how God had worked in his particular situation.

Verse 2. God turned His ear or focused on the psalmist. The Lord's turning His ear is an affirmation God didn't just hear but listened emphatically. The psalmist's response was a life-long commitment. The writer first declared his love for God, then his intention to continue to bring his needs to the Lord throughout his life. He had the confidence his concerns mattered to God; therefore he would continue to call to the Lord in the midst of further distresses in life.

Verse 3. The ropes of death convey helplessness in the face of trouble. Whatever the difficulty, it was life-threatening, and the psalmist felt powerless. Sheol was understood to be a "pit" under the earth where bodies returned to dust, a place of captivity, darkness, and silence. The writer used the image to relate the utter terror and helplessness he had known. Trouble and sorrow were all he had seen in his path. He could not save himself, nor was anyone around him who had power to intervene.

Verse 4. In his desperation the psalmist called on God. His prayer was not complex, but a simple cry: "Lord, save me!" A simple cry of faith and dependence on God is the first step into His kingdom. In desperation we may not know how to pray as we would in other, more routine circumstances. The psalmist gave us a good example of a short prayer that came from his heart.

PSALM 116:5-9

Verse 5. The psalmist's heart was overflowing with gratitude for God's attention to his cries for help. He used three descriptions of God. First, God is gracious—He returns kindness for our sin. The third is similar. God is compassionate. He is filled with loving thoughts and deeds toward His people. The second description is that God is righteous. He has established a standard of obedience and exhorts every person to flee from disobedience. He will be humanity's final judge as we give account to Him of our choices in life. A proper understanding of God seeks to balance the polarities of compassion and judgment.

Verses 6-9. Inexperienced implies the writer's plight was unlike anything he'd known or anticipated before. Whatever the case, he offered a personal testimony of the compassionate God he called to. He saved me means God overlooked the writer's inadequacies and gave him assurance.

The writer returned to the theme of death (v. 8) when he addressed God directly for the first time in this psalm. He didn't mention the malady he faced but it made him believe death was near. But due to God's deliverance he had renewed hope. In gratitude he declared his tears were over and his feet were back on solid ground.

I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living can speak of his deliverance from death or of his commitment. Perhaps the writer asserted his intention to demonstrate gratitude by living righteously. To walk before the Lord may imply living obediently before others as a witness to God's power. Living obediently before the Lord is the calling of every believer and is necessary to impact those outside faith. As we rest in God who is compassionate toward us, we can offer that rest to those who need it.

PSALM 116:15-17

Verses 15-16. Some have called modern believers "Easter people" for our hope in everlasting life. Those who die in God's care are valuable in

His sight. Once again, the psalmist declared an intention to serve the Lord for the remainder of his days. Loosened my bonds is a euphemism for deliverance from the specter of destruction and death. One kept in bonds had no freedom of expression or self-will but found oneself entirely dependent on the whims of the master. This kind of slavery is repugnant to a sense of justice. Female servant may refer to a godly mother who gave him life and taught him faith. But whatever the case, the writer declared commitment to a new and liberating servitude before the Lord in contrast to the hopeless slavery he'd known before.

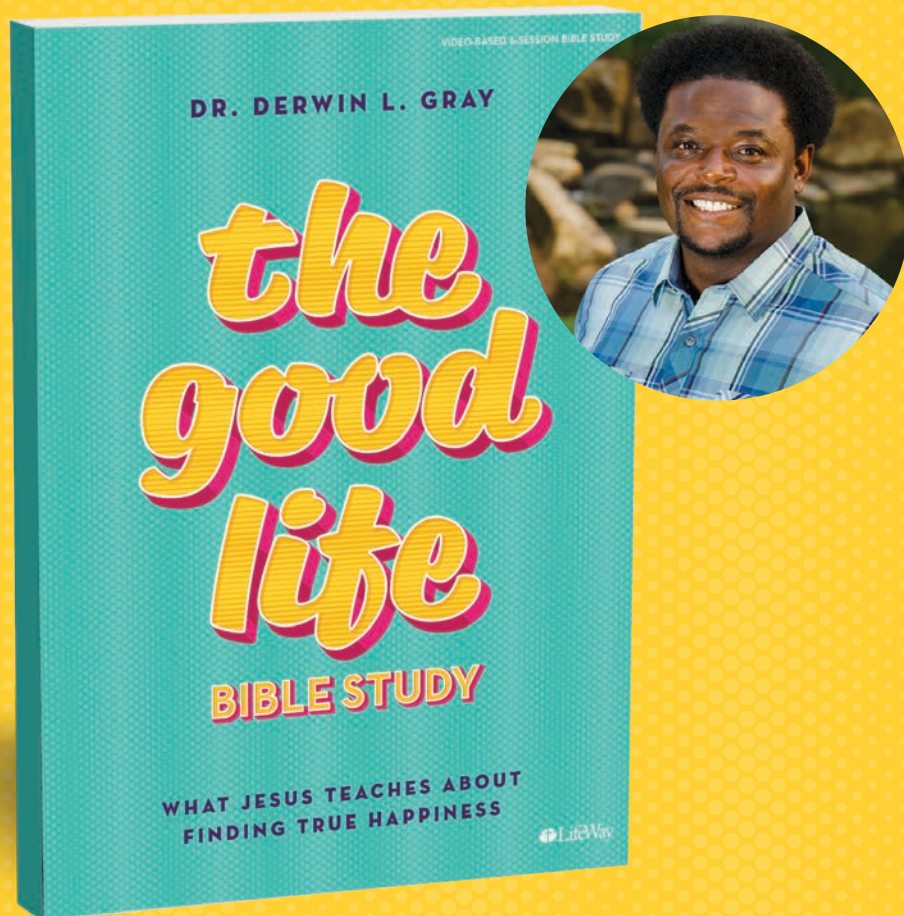
Verse 17. For a fourth time in this passage (vv. 2,9,16) the writer declared his intention to serve God with his life: I will offer you a sacrifice of thanksgiving. The sacrifice of thanksgiving is something we do first in our daily prayer time. Thanksgiving is important for everyone saved by Jesus. The sacrifice of thanksgiving is also important for the gathered church. Thanksgiving mustn't be something we think of only in one season of the year. Again the writer declared he would call on the Lord in the days he had remaining in his life. The Lord had proven faithful, so he promised two things in return. First, he would continue to call on the Lord who proved faithful. Second, he would follow the Lord as a committed servant in his world. We're assured the God we serve is faithful at the end of life. When death comes, our deaths are "valuable" in His sight. Let us trust God who cares for us in our darkest hour.



Read the article "Death and Sheol: A Hebrew Understanding" in the Winter 2020-2021 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*.

Read the articles "Sheol: An Old Testament Understanding" (Winter 2014-2015) and "Death in the Old Testament" (Winter 1997-1998) in the Winter 2020-2021 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*.

SHARE THE GOOD LIFE



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