

Small Group Guide FROM FEAR TO FAITH

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. David Platt

May 4, 2014

Psalm 56

Use this resource as a tool to help Christ-followers move forward in their spiritual growth. To do this well requires that the Small Group Leader is building a relationship with the individuals in the small group and has identified where the people are in their relationship with God. Are they Christ-followers? Are they growing in Christ? If so, in what areas do they need to grow further? As disciplinarians, Small Group Leaders shepherd people to know the truth of Scripture, to understand why it matters, and to apply it to their lives. Small Group Leaders come alongside those whom they disciple to discover how loving God, loving each other, and loving those not yet in the Kingdom should shape how they live. The structure of this resource coincides with moving people from knowledge (Main Truth) to understanding (Why It Matters) to application (Now What Do We Do?). Utilize this Small Group Guide as a flexible teaching tool to inform your time together and not as a rigid task list.

GETTING STARTED

Before Small Group

Readings for May 5-11

Numbers 12-20, Psalms 49-59

Where We Are In The Story ~ Old Testament (Numbers)

Background of Numbers: Within two years of leaving Egypt, the Israelites arrive on the fringes of the Promised Land and enthusiastically send in twelve spies to scout the land, but instead of trusting in God's promises to give them the land, the people fearfully rebelled and made plans to return to Egypt (Num. 14:1-4). Written by Moses, this book contains the record of what happened to the Israelites during the forty years of wilderness wanderings that occurred because of their disobedience and doubt. The English title of Numbers refers to the prominent census accounts in the book that reflect the fulfillment of God's promise that none of the people who had experienced God's deliverance from Egypt would enter into the Promised Land, except for Caleb and Joshua (Num. 14:20-35).

Structure of Numbers:

- Numbers 1:1-10:10 occurs while Israel is still at Mt. Sinai, and it picks up where Exodus leaves off.
- Numbers 10:11-12:16 describes the Israelites' journey from Mt. Sinai to the outskirts of the Promised Land.
- Numbers 13:1-20:13 contains significant accounts of disobedience by the nation, a Sabbath-breaker, Korah, and Moses, and it includes God's response and instruction in light of those events.
- Numbers 20:14-22:1 tell of Israel's military victories against several hostile nations and emphasizes God's preservation of His people.
- Numbers 22:2-36:13 concludes the book with a census of the people, a reiteration of the laws and feasts given by God, and a transfer of leadership from Moses to Joshua as the people prepare to enter the Promised Land after their wilderness wanderings.

This Week in Numbers: As Israel continued on their journey from Mt. Sinai to the Promised Land, Aaron and Miriam rebelled by speaking against Moses and by attempting to subvert his leadership of the people (Num. 12). God quickly responded by striking Miriam with leprosy, emphasizing Moses' God-given authority to lead the Israelites. Soon after this event, Israel arrived to the wilderness of Paran, which is the modern-day region of northeastern Sinai Peninsula and southern Israel. Because they were quickly approaching the Promised Land, God gave them directions to send twelve spies (one from each tribe of Israel) to scout out the land and to bring back a status report of the land itself, the people, the cities, and the produce. When the spies returned, they brought back evidence of the land's fruitfulness (Num. 13:23), but their report focused on the fortified cities, the military strength of the nations living in the land, and the size of the Canaanites (Num. 13:25-33). They even mention descendants of the Nephilim living in the land (see Gen. 6:4). Whether or not

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this is the actual Nephilim (since the original people would have been destroyed in the Flood), their inclusion of this people group emphasizes their perception of the Canaanites' superior size and strength.

The Israelites allowed their fear of the Canaanites to eclipse their faith in God and His promises. God had promised to give them the land (Gen. 12; 15; 17; Ex. 3; 24; Num. 13), and they had experienced His great power with the plagues, Passover, Exodus, and His provisions in the wilderness. Yet they did not trust Him enough to take the land in faith. Their fear and distrust led them to complain and rebel against God. As a result, God judged Israel by sentencing them to forty years of wilderness wandering. It took the spies forty days to go through the land, so they would wander for forty years (Num. 14:34). During this time, the entire faithless generation of Israelites (all Israelites older than age twenty) would die, except for Caleb and Joshua who were the two spies who trusted God and advocated taking the land (Num. 14:20-38).

When the people learned of their consequences and when they saw the ten spies who gave the negative report die by a plague sent from God, they tried to course correct and head into battle against the Amalekites and the Canaanites, but they were defeated (Num. 14:36-45). It was too late. The Israelites could have had God's promise within two years of leaving Egypt, but they forfeited His blessing by their own faithlessness, heaping on themselves suffering and death.

Despite their sin, God remained committed to His promises (Num. 15:1-2), and He gave them instructions regarding sacrifices and how to respond when they sin unintentionally (Num. 15). While in the wilderness, the people discovered one of their own breaking Sabbath by working. At this point, they faced a choice – would they keep God's commands in how they responded to his sin, or would they disobey God again? They responded with obedience this time, but this display of obedience was quickly followed by a mutiny against Moses and Aaron led by Korah (Num. 16). They opposed God's design in setting the Levites as the priests and in naming Aaron as the high priest, and God struck the rebels with a plague and reiterated His plan regarding the priests and Levites (Lev. 17-19).

As the people of Israel complain yet again – this time about their need for water (Num. 20:2-9) – Moses disobeyed God's instructions. Instead of speaking to the rock as instructed, he struck it, and Moses verbally lashed out against the people (Num. 20:10-11). Because of their disobedience, God did not permit Moses and Aaron to enter the Promised Land, and the chapter closes with the death of Aaron (Num. 20:22-29). Psalm 95 points God's people to this event at Meribah and exhorts us not to emulate the obstinate, ungrateful, and rebellious attitudes of the Israelites.

Where We Are In The Story ~ Old Testament (Psalms)

Background & Structure of Psalms: God used many different writers to write Psalms: David, Moses, the sons of Korah, Asaph, etc. The book is arranged in five parts, and this arrangement occurred after the people of Israel returned to the land after the Babylonian exile. A doxology concludes each book or arrangement of psalms (Psalm 41:13 for Book 1, Psalm 72:18-19 for Book 2, Psalm 89:52 for Book 3, Psalm 106:48 for Book 4, and Psalm 150:6 for Book 5), and the entire book of Psalms climactically ends with a grand doxology of several psalms (Ps. 146-150).

- Book 1: Psalms 1-41
- Book 2: Psalms 42-72
- Book 3: Psalms 73-89
- Book 4: Psalms 90-106
- Book 5: Psalms 107-150

This Week in Psalms:

- As a wisdom psalm, Psalm 49 warns against trusting in riches and in the things that the world offers, for it is foolish to spend one's short life on things that are not eternal. The righteous can

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- know that the ungodly and the wealth of this world will not last. Only those who trust in the Lord will triumph in the end.
- Psalm 50 describes a courtroom scene in which God brings His case against Israel for their hypocritical worship of Him. They performed the prescribed sacrifices and rituals, but they sinned against God and others. As a result, they would be judged unless they changed their ways. This psalm warns believers against outward “worship” that lacks the trust and obedience that stems from an authentic relationship with God.
 - Psalm 51 records King David’s confession of his affair with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband (see 2 Sam. 11-12). This penitential psalm includes a cry for forgiveness (vv. 1-2), a description of why forgiveness is needed (vv. 3-6), a petition for forgiveness and spiritual renewal (vv. 7-12), and a vow to praise God (vv. 13-19). This psalm expresses our need for cleansing from sin in order to enjoy fellowship with the Lord. Like King David, we can confess our sin to God and receive forgiveness for our transgressions (1 Jn. 1:9). However, we must not live as though He offers cheap grace. Knowing that He will forgive does not give us license to sin.
 - The superscription to Psalm 52 references an event that is recorded in 1 Samuel 22:17-23 when Doeg betrayed David by giving up his location to King Saul when David was on the run. The psalm pronounces judgment on those who deceive and who love evil. In contrast, the righteous will flourish like olive trees (v. 8). Because olive trees live for hundreds of years and produce fruit that has a variety of uses, the psalmist draws upon this simile to emphasize just how fruitful and blessed the faithful will be.
 - Psalm 53 describes the sinfulness of man and repeats the same content as Psalm 14. According to Dr. Allen Ross in *A Commentary on Psalms* (Vol. 2), “Psalm 14 seems to focus on comfort for the faithful; Psalm 53 stresses a warning for the wicked.”
 - 1 Samuel 23 records the events of Psalm 54, and in this situation, the Ziphites gave up David’s location to King Saul who was attempting to kill David. David cries out to God for rescue and for vindication, expresses confidence in God’s help and protection, and promises to praise God for His deliverance.
 - In Psalm 55, David expresses confidence in God despite the oppression of his enemies and the betrayal of a close friend. Despite the situation, David knew he could approach God with his concerns and appeal to Him to intervene because of God’s character.
 - The odd superscription of Psalm 56 likely refers to a melody that was to be used with this particular psalm, and this psalm was written by King David regarding the events of 1 Samuel 21. Both Psalm 56 and Psalm 57 express confidence in the Lord who is over all.
 - Psalm 58 stands as a lament about ungodly rulers, and the psalmist turns to God for vengeance and justice as he brings his charges against these corrupt leaders. This psalm demonstrates that it is acceptable to ask God to end the influence of ungodly leaders and to judge them for their wickedness.
 - As a lament psalm, David composed Psalm 59 in light of the events described in 1 Samuel 19. He requests deliverance from his enemies, and after describing his perilous circumstances, the psalmist declares the sovereignty and strength of the Lord. His enemies do not operate outside of the Lord’s purview, and the psalmist petitions God to act in a way that the world will recognize *He* is Lord.

During Small Group

Welcome – Incorporate time for greeting one another, enjoying any refreshments, and making announcements. If guests are visiting, make introductions and help them feel welcomed. Ask for their contact information, so you can follow up with them.

Looking Back – Provide an opportunity for small group members to share what God is teaching them, how they are applying what they are learning, and how He has given them opportunities to share the gospel with others. This can be done as a whole group or in smaller groups. Do the people know each other well enough to share more than surface level information? How can time together be used to foster deeper relationships

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among those in the small group? Also, what are the struggles and needs of the people in the small group? How can the people in the small group sacrificially serve each other?

Looking Up – Hold prayer as fundamental to small group time rather than supplemental to it. Give adoration and thanksgiving to God in prayer. Submit yourself to Him, confessing sin. Petition God for personal needs and other requests. Pray for the disciple-making efforts of those in the group and for the salvation of the lost in each other's families, spheres of influence, and in the world. The Weekly Prayer Focus below can also be incorporated in the group's prayer time.

Weekly Prayer Focus (from Our Worship Guide)

- *Pray for Our Lives:* Praise God for His graciousness toward us. Thank Him for His perfect love, which casts out all fear. Praise Him for His power over any and every trouble we may face in life. Ask God to grow our love of and dependence upon His Word. Pray for all those around us who are feeling alone or afraid to put their hope in God. Thank God for His deliverance from our sin.
- *Pray for Our City:* This week we are praying for the ministry of The Wellhouse, a Christ-centered nonprofit ministry that offers immediate shelter and transitional housing to women who have been trafficked, are prostituting, or are otherwise sexually exploited (the-wellhouse.org). We are also praying for Valleydale Church and Jason Dees, Pastor.
- *Pray for Our World:* For the next three weeks we will be spending our time highlighting and praying for the People of Turkey. This was our highlight for Secret Church, and we as a faith family want to join the thousands around the world who are praying for Turkey. Join us this week as we pray for the Turks of Turkey. This week we are also praying for our short-term team serving in Greece.

MAIN TRUTH

Message Outline

Identifying with the Psalmist...

- Have you ever felt overwhelmed?
- Have you ever been opposed?
- Have you ever felt alone?
- Have you ever been afraid?

Implications of the Psalm...

- Put your trust in the character of God.
 - He is the merciful God.
 - He is the omnipotent God.
 - He is the God who judges sin.
 - He is the God who sees, hears, knows, and remembers suffering.
 - He is the God who delivers from darkness and death.
 - He is the God who gives light to life.
- Lift your heart to the Word of God.
 - His Word is supreme.
 - His Word is sure.
 - His Word is sufficient.
- Place your hope in the Son of God.

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- He is the fullness of God's character.
- He is the Word made flesh.

Message Summary

This psalm notes a time of struggle in the life of David. He wrote it while he was sandwiched between his own king who was out to kill him and the hometown king of the giant, Goliath, whose head he had severed, effectively ending the Philistine stance against Israel. Saul wanted to kill David because God had taken the royal line away from Saul's family and anointed David as the next king. Therefore, Saul's pursuit against David was actually a result of Saul's sin and God's sovereign decisions. The Philistines had taunted the Israelites and railed against the one true God. When David took a stand against them, he killed Goliath. Therefore, the Philistines' hatred of David was also a result of his relationship with God and boldness for Him. Stuck in a place of oppression and loneliness, David was afraid.

It was from this place of fear and opposition that David cried out to God. Although he did call on God's justice for his enemies, David primarily focused on the merciful and gracious character of God who had already given life to David's soul. He also noted that God had given him a promise for his life, and David believed God's Word is always sure. God had a plan for David, and David believed that God would not only bring it to fruition but also care for him in the process. In times of fear, David staked his confidence in God's gracious, sovereign character and in His faithful Word. David believed that God had the ability and the desire to accomplish His plan; therefore, David did not have to be afraid.

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

As the leader, there are at least three directions the small group can take in light of the current Bible reading plan. Knowing the people in the group, prayerfully consider what would be the best route to help those in your group grow. The group's meetings could also vary with each week, so if one week's sermon prompts a lot of thought and discussion, option one could be what the group does that week while the next week could be different. As the leader, feel the freedom to take all or just some of the content in this guide and do what is best for your group.

- *Using the discussion questions below, the small group time can focus on discussing the sermon and how to apply it.*
- *The group can discuss the Bible readings from the past week. If choosing this route, ensure that the group does not simply discuss information but also focuses on how to apply what they have learned from the Bible readings. The information in the "Where We Are in the Story" section can assist the leader in knowing the background and context for the readings.*
- *Using the REAP (read, examine, apply, pray) outline for studying Scripture, the group can take one or both passages from that day's readings and discuss them. So if the group meets on Monday, then you could pick one or both of the passages for Monday. This also helps those who are new to studying the Bible or who struggle with reading it learn how to do so. To assist the group with REAP questions, download the Guide to Personal Worship from brookhills.org.*

Considering the context for a psalm is essential to rightly understanding and applying it to our lives. David was in a true place of loneliness and fear, mostly because of his relationship with God and because of God's work in his life. In this psalm, David was not facing struggle because he had sinned or made poor decisions. Of no fault of his own, David was facing death, oppression, loneliness, and fear. Point out that we must be careful to consider the context of a psalm before we claim it as an anthem for our own situation. At times,

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repentance may be the appropriate response; at other times, humility may be the needed attitude; at other times, confidence and peace may be needed. Why is it dangerous to read apply a psalm (or any passage) to our lives without the proper context? How do we find the proper context of a psalm? Many psalms do not contain a superscription (the note at the beginning of the psalm that tells you who wrote the psalm or what event prompted them to write it), so how do we study and interpret psalms correctly?

Encourage each other to share a time when they have felt overwhelmed or afraid as a result of circumstances outside of their control. How can we pray for one another in regards to these kinds of struggles? How can we encourage each other practically when it seems we are playing a losing game of spiritual dodgeball?

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

Group Discussion & Application

Use the following questions to help review the application of God's Word to our Head (What does God want me to know?), to our Heart (What does God want me to desire/value?), and to our Hands (What does God want me to do?).

- How does David describe his situation in this psalm? How does his honesty (instead of fake spirituality) allow us to better understand his relationship with the Lord? What often prevents us from being this raw and honest about what is happening in our lives?
- Our emotions often indicate what we believe about God, ourselves, and/or other people. If you consider what you have felt today (annoyed, upset, bitter, insecure, anxious, etc.), why have you felt that way? What thought or belief is behind that emotion? How does that thought or belief line up with the truth proclaimed in Scripture?
- David's situation came as a direct result of his obedience to the Lord. What does this truth indicate about following God?
- What encouragement can we have in God's sovereignty even in times of opposition?
- David had a promise from God that he would become king. Therefore, his trust in God's word led inevitably to his survival of his present situation. However, David's comfort was not solely in survival. How did he find peace in verses 8 and 13?
- Why can we also claim the truth of verses 8 and 13 in our lives? What do they tell us about the character of God?
- Do we allow ourselves and others to be transparent about struggles in our small group? How can this kind of openness help to strengthen the faith of one another as we encourage and live through pain?
- When we are suffering at the hands of others, including slander and physical hurt, how do we pray as David did in verse 7 for the situation?
- How do we practically stand for justice without fostering bitterness? How do we stand for righteousness and also "turn the other cheek"?
- David asked for justice against men who were truly unjust and sinful. How does that differ from the way we pray for and interact with others who simply have different personalities or idiosyncrasies that irritate us?
- David was certainly alone in the circumstances of Psalm 56; however, his other psalms indicate that he valued prayer and communication with God. His belief that God cared deeply about him led David to call out to God before talking with others. What does our pattern of prayer indicate about our belief in God's kind character and about the vitality of prayer in a believer's life?
- Living in a world affected by sin means that believers will face difficulty through sickness, disease, pain from others, and other challenges. It also means that following Christ does not negate emotions like fear, depression, and loneliness. How did David see his circumstances and emotion in light of God's sovereignty and character?
- What promises does God give His people in Scripture that we can claim today? (Examples include His unending presence, the Holy Spirit, and strength.)

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- How does our trust in God's character and His promises to us go hand-in-hand? How can we keep the faithfulness of God's character and His promises a focal point of our daily lives?