

**PLEASE DON'T READ THESE NOTES UNTIL YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR LESSON.
YOU WILL ROB YOURSELF OF THE JOY OF DISCOVERY!**

**In case you don't have time to discuss all the questions,
be sure to ask your group which questions
they want discuss.**

INTRODUCTION

Psalm 116 is a personal song of praise and thanksgiving to God. It celebrates the writer's deliverance from a difficult experience that caused him great distress. We don't know for sure who the author is, but this Psalm could be written by any of us. We can all relate to crying out to God in the midst of a difficult and distressing situation. God lovingly and mercifully responds to our suffering and delivers us. With deep gratitude, we wonder, "How can I say thanks"?

When Sybil Towner taught on **Psalm 103** at our large group meeting in February, she stressed the importance of letting God's Word *read us*, instead of us trying to *read and master* the content of God's Word. Sybil had us do an ancient practice called *lectio divina* (divine or sacred reading). *Lectio divina* is a slow, contemplative reading of Scripture which enables us to have a *personal*

encounter with God as he speaks to us through his Word. Using this method, we present the ears and eyes of our hearts to God as we *listen* and *look* for what he is saying to us. It is a wonderful way of helping you hear God's personal words to YOU!

Discuss this method; make sure everyone understands what it is and why it's effective.

In this lesson, we will practice the method that Sybil taught us in each of the three sections of **Psalm 116**. Do the exercises of *reading, listening and responding* before you answer the questions for each section. Hearing God and letting his words speak to your heart is always worth the time and effort you put into it. This method of reading can be used with any portion of Scripture. It is a way to help God's Word come alive and active in your life.

DISCUSSION STARTER

- When has a friend or family member helped you through a difficult experience?
- What are some of the ways we express our gratitude to people who help us?

PREPARATION

1. Before you read **Psalm 116**, ask the Holy Spirit to teach you and guide you into all truth (John 16:13). We have been using the prayer, *Holy Spirit, think through me until your ideas become my ideas*, or King David's prayer, *Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your law*.
2. Read **Psalm 116** slowly and thoughtfully in at least two translations. Which translation do you prefer for this Psalm? Why?

Since the Psalms are poetry, have 2 Readers read this Psalm

Reader A: Verses 1-19 odd

Reader B: Verses 2-18 even

OR Divide into 2 groups and read together, back and forth

3. If this Psalm were divided into 3 sections or stanzas, where would you make the divisions?

There is not right or wrong answer – You could suggest dividing between verses 3 and 4 or 4 and 5; And then between verses 11 and 12

4. Summarize **Psalm 116** in a title.

QUESTIONS

Slowly read Psalm 116:1-4. In your Bible or on the Scripture handout, mark, underline or circle any word, phrase or sentence that seems to connect with your heart as you read.

Read the verses again and then write or draw below a thought or response to something you have marked.

If someone wants to share some insight from these sections, encourage them to do so. You, as facilitator, may want to share something to encourage others or you may ask someone ahead of time to be prepared to share if they so desire.

At least discuss the exercise and the value of reading God's Word this way. For those who haven't tried it, encourage them to do so at some point. This can be done with any portion of scripture. The purpose of Bible study is not to add to our knowledge of the Bible (although that will happen). The purpose of Bible study is to have an encounter with God and to grow in our relationship to him.

Read the verses again. Quiet your heart and listen to any *thoughts or impressions* that come to you. Write or draw what *you think God is saying to you*. Make it personal! If you choose to **write** an impression, write it as if God were writing you a personal note and begin the note with your name. Don't be concerned about whether these are actually God's words to you; just write what you *think* God might be saying. (Use the back of the page if you need to.)

5. Psalm 116 begins with a simple, forthright statement. What reasons does the psalmist give for loving God? 116:1-2

Because God heard his voice and his cry for mercy and because God listened.

♥ Are these good reasons? Why or why not? Encourage discussion. When God hears and listens to us, he is showing his love and concern. We respond by loving him.

6. How does Psalm 116:1-2 echo 1 John 4:19?

We love him because he first loved us is essentially that same as I love the Lord because he heard and answered my prayer. God is showing his love when he listens to us and we, then, love him back.

7. If asked, what three reasons would you give for loving God? Write your answer by finishing this sentence, "God, I love you because . . ."

Ask if some would like to share what they wrote. This encourages others.

♥ Is your devotion to God based on what he has done for you? Why or why not?

♥ Can you make the same promise that the psalmist does in 116:2? Why or why not?

8. What word pictures does the psalmist use to describe his distress? 116:3

"cords of death entangled me (death had its hands around my throat)

anguish of the grave (terrors of the grave)

overcome by trouble and sorrow

♥ From the images and descriptions the psalmist uses, speculate about some situations or circumstances that might have caused his distress.

His anguish could have been caused by illness, pain, enemies trying to kill him, in prison waiting for execution, worry and grief caused by various hard times . . .

♥ When was a time in your life that the psalmist feelings could have described your feelings too?

What do we experience in our lives that gives us the same feelings the Psalmist suffered?

9. What did the psalmist do when he was in distress? **116:4**

Called out to God to save him

What is the first thing you usually do when you are in distress? (Be honest!)

Have several share – For example, sometimes we try to help ourselves; we try to fix what's wrong; we call out to other people; we deny anything is wrong, we escape by eating or drinking or leisure activities

♥ If you call on God when you are in trouble, do you really expect him to save you? Why or why not?

Slowly read Psalm 116:5-11. In your Bible or on the Scripture handout, mark, underline or circle any word, phrase or sentence that seems to connect with your heart as you read.

Read the verses again and then write or draw below a thought or response to something you have marked.

Would anyone like to share?

Read the verses again. Quiet your heart and listen to any thoughts or impressions that come to you. Write or draw what *you think God is saying to you*. Don't forget to make it personal!

10. How does the psalm-writer describe God in **116:5**?

Gracious, kind, righteous, good, makes things right, full of compassion, merciful, most compassionate

Write your own description of God based on his actions towards you in the last couple of weeks.

Answering this question compels us to consider how God has intervened in our lives recently

11. According to **116:6**, what kind of person does God protect? Simplehearted; those with child-like faith; helpless

Why do you think this is so?

God waits for us to give up control. He won't fight us if we are trying to do it ourselves. If we want to be on our own, he will let us do just that. When we finally admit we can't do it and we are helpless and weak, he is more than willing to step in and protect us. It is a question on dependence or independence.

♥ In what areas of your life do you think you are simplehearted (having child-like faith)? In what areas of your life do you resist being like this? What can you do to change?

12. What inner condition is a consequence of God's goodness to us? **116:7**

Soul rest or inner peace

♥ How would you explain and describe this inner condition to someone?

Answers will vary, but soul rest is an inner condition of peace and tranquility regardless of outward situations and circumstances. It is possible to have soul rest in the midst of a very hard time.

♥ How important to you is this inner condition? How often do you experience it?

13. Read **Jeremiah 6:16** and **Matthew 11:28-29**. What are some specific things you can do to experience soul rest?

Stop, consider, look for and learn about God's ways and then choose to walk in them. Living life God's way brings inner peace. We literally go to Jesus when we are weary and have heavy burdens. He joins himself to us and carries our burdens so that we can rest.

The Message Bible translates Matt. 11:28-29 this way: "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. **29 Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it.** Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you.

♥ Who else or what else do you sometimes look to for soul rest? Do you attain it?
What God substitutes do we use (that never work for long.)

14. From what specific things will God deliver us? **116:8**
Delivers our souls from death (fear and anxiety), our eyes from tears (pain, grief and sorrow)
our feet from stumbling (directionless wandering – trying to find our own way)

What does God give us in exchange? (**116:9**, especially in *The Message*)
Walking in God's presence – walking with confidence – Alive!

Describe a time that God made this exchange for you.

Slowly read Psalm 116:12-19. In your Bible or on the Scripture handout, mark, underline or circle any word, phrase or sentence that seems to connect with your heart as you read.

Read the verses again and then write or draw below a thought or response to something you have marked.

Would anyone like to share?

Read the verses again. Quiet your heart and listen to any thoughts or impressions that come to you. Write or draw what *you think God is saying to you*. Don't forget to make it personal!

15. Because God heard and responded to his cry for help, what does the psalmist desire to do? (**116:12**, read in all four translations)

Repay God for his goodness; offer something back to God or give back to him. The Psalmist is looking for a way to say "Thanks".

"Render to the Lord" is used in the Amplified Bible. Render means to give what is due or appropriate to somebody who has authority or power.

Thanksgiving - The offering of thanks, especially for gifts received. Scripture emphasizes the importance of giving thanks to God for all his gifts and works, both as an expression of our dependence upon him and our gratitude to him. Gratitude is the *thankful awareness* that all good things come from God. We can acknowledge God's goodness by expressing praise or by bringing a sacrifice.

16. What specific things did the psalmist plan to do as an expression of his gratitude? **116:1, 2, 13-14, 17-19**

v. 1 - love God

v. 2 - Pray as long as he has breath!

v. 13 - Lift up the cup of salvation - publicly honor God - bring sacrifices; praise God's name for saving him.

v. 14 - Fulfill his vows or keep the promises he made to God - letting others know of God's goodness

v. 17 - make a point of thanking God - sacrificing time and effort to do so

v. 19 - Praise God, especially in the community of believers

♥ With which of these expressions do you most identify? Why?

Cup of Salvation - During Hebrew religious ceremonies, a cup of wine was lifted to God as an expression of thanksgiving. The psalm-writer celebrates God's goodness in saving him and publicly acknowledges his gratitude.
Thank offerings - Thank offerings were brought to the temple to express gratitude to God for deliverance from trouble, healing of sickness, answers to prayer or some other blessing. *Quest Bible*

The following heart questions are good discussion questions to apply what has been learned in this Psalm. Choose a couple to discuss with the group.

- ♥ How can you publicly acknowledge your gratitude to God or what "thank offering" can you give him?
 - ♥ What vows (baptismal, marriage, church, private) have you made to God and are you keeping them?
 - ♥ Why is gratitude and thanksgiving an appropriate way to "give back" to God? What effect does thanksgiving have on the one who gives it?
 - ♥ Read **116:15** in all four translations. What does this verse tell you about God's feelings toward you?
17. How will *you* answer the question in **116:12**? (You may want to consider **1 Corinthians 10:16**; **Psalm 95:2**; **1 Timothy 2:1**; **2 Corinthians 9:11-12** and **1 Thessalonians 5:18** for some ideas.)

Showing gratitude to God is more than just saying "Thank you." In light of all he has done for us, our thanksgiving should come from our best efforts and all that we are – just as when we show love in human relationships.

Specifically, Scripture shows us (references listed above) that we can say thanks by participating with other believers in Communion or the Lord's Supper. (In liturgical churches, this celebration is called The Great Thanksgiving.) We look for ways to serve and pray for others as we worship with them.

We can extol or praise God with music and song. We do this by focusing on him sing our heart out to him for all he has done for us. This too is very effective when practiced in community.

We commit ourselves to praying for others – with thanksgiving. This honors God and others. It is a wonderful way to say thanks.

We **sacrificially** give to others who are in need or give to support the Kingdom of God in some place. We don't give out of our excess, but give in such a way that we are giving up something ourselves in gratitude for what God has done for us. We may give to others, but we are really giving to God.

We look for creative ways to give thanks in all circumstances. This honors God and shows our dependence and trust in him and his promises.

RESPONSE:

Consider keeping a *Gratitude Journal*. Daily record in a notebook three blessings or gifts from God for which you want to thank him. Remember, *every* good gift in your life is from God (**James 1:17**). Keeping a *Gratitude Journal* will train your heart to look for God's goodness and to express thanksgiving to him. You cannot do this exercise and remain unchanged. This is also a wonderful thing to do as a family or with your children. For children, looking for God's goodness is like a treasure hunt and it will cultivate in them an attitude of thanksgiving as well as teach them that God is the source of all good things.

This is an exercise that does not take a lot of time, but it has invaluable results. It teaches us and build in us a heart of gratitude. It is as simple as finding just 3 things each day that you can thank God for. Writing them down helps us to remember and becomes a record of God's work in our lives. It is a way of "counting our blessings" when things get tough. A gratitude journal helps us to not take the good things God gives us for granted. We all know how unpleasant an ungrateful child is – and we are God's children. The ungrateful person becomes self-centered and selfish.

On the next page is all the "extra scripture" from this lesson in case you want to make copies for your group so that you can easily read together the verses referred to in the questions.

1John 4:19

We love because he first loved us.

Jeremiah 6:16

This is what the LORD says: “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, ‘We will not walk in it.’”

Matthew 11:28

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. **29** Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

1Corinthians 10:16

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?

Psalms 95:2

Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.

1Timothy 2:1

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—

2Corinthians 9:11

You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. **12** This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

1Thessalonians 5:18

give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

1John 4:19

We love each other as a result of his loving us first.

Jeremiah 6:16

So now the LORD says, “Stop right where you are! Look for the old, godly way, and walk in it. Travel its path, and you will find rest for your souls. But you reply, ‘No, that’s not the road we want!’”

Matthew 11:28

Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. **29** Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls.

1Corinthians 10:16

When we bless the cup at the Lord’s Table, aren’t we sharing in the benefits of the blood of Christ? And when we break the loaf of bread, aren’t we sharing in the benefits of the body of Christ?

Psalms 95:2

Let us come before him with thanksgiving. Let us sing him psalms of praise.

1Timothy 2:1

I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. As you make your requests, plead for God’s mercy upon them, and give thanks.

2Corinthians 9:11

Yes, you will be enriched so that you can give even more generously. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will break out in thanksgiving to God. **12** So two good things will happen—the needs of the Christians in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanksgiving to God.

1Thessalonians 5:18 No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.