

Leader Notes – Lesson 7 – Am I Forsaken? Psalm 22

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

These are suggested responses – your group may have even better answers!
Don't try to include everything and you may not need to use any of the below!
I make these comments to clarify and give some additional thoughts and suggestions.

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

DISCUSSION STARTER

- Why does it hurt when a friend rejects you or turns a cold shoulder?

PREPARATION

1. Before you read **Psalm 22**, 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 22** slowly and thoughtfully in at least two translations. As you read and reread, mark any words or phrases that are meaningful to you and put a question mark by anything that you don't understand.

Reader A: Odd verses

Reader B: Even verses

3. Write out some phrases from **Psalm 22** that most closely reflect *your* spiritual or emotional feelings at this time, both positive and negative.

Encourage several to share

4. There is a definite change of tone from despair to praise in the middle of this Psalm. Between which two verses does this change seem to occur?

There is a definite shift in tone between verses 21 and 22

QUESTIONS

5. Put David's questions and complaint from **22:1-2** into your own words. How would *you* express these thoughts in more contemporary language?

Encourage several to share – Notice how *The Message* paraphrases it

Why have you forsaken me? *Forsake* is much more than someone ignoring you and not caring about your suffering. Forsake means to withdraw protection and support *that was once given*. It means to abandon, desert, withdraw and disown. Forsake means that there once was a supportive, loving relationship, but now, when you need it most, that support has been intentionally cut off and you are left to fend for yourself.

- ♥ Considering the meaning of forsake, why are the questions in **22:1** particularly painful?

God used to be there for the sufferer; David knows what it was like to have God close and communicating. But now it seems like he is forsaken. David may have been thinking – it would be better if I had never known.

♥ How would the meaning of 22:1 be changed if it read, "Oh God, oh God . . ." instead of *My God, my God . . .*?"

Again, this isn't a cry to an impersonal God out there someplace. It is a cry to MY God, who used to be close but isn't anymore. This seems like personal rejection.

6. Besides feeling forsaken, what two specific complaints does the sufferer have about what he perceives to be God's behavior in 22:1-2?

Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?

God is distant

O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer – God is silent

♥ Even though the Psalmist feels forsaken by God, what does he continue to do in 22:2?

He continues to call out to God.

What should we do when God seems silent or distant?

We, too, need to continue to call out to God, trusting there is a reason why he seems distant and silent

Is this easy or hard for you to do?

We may get angry or give God the cold shoulder. Sometimes it's hard to keep praying, but by doing so we are saying that God is our hope.

7. Despite feeling forsaken, what is the sufferer's response to God? 22:3

He praises God anyway. God never changes. He is still holy (good, kind, just, faithful, etc.) regardless of what we are feeling or experiencing. By continuing to praise God, I am declaring that I believe God and his promises to be true.

What does this response reveal about the act of worship?

It is possible to worship God regardless of how we are feeling or what our circumstances are. God never changes so He is always worthy of our praise.

♥ The NIV margin note tells us that 22:3 can be translated, *Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel*. What promise does this hold for us when we choose to praise God despite how we are feeling or what we are experiencing?

If God is enthroned on my praises, it means his Presence is with me when I praise him. He comes in a special way when I choose to worship and praise him. If he seems silent or distant, this verse says His presence will be sensed when we praise—especially if we praise together (his is enthroned upon the praises of **Israel**).

8. Why is the sufferer confident that God will eventually rescue and deliver him? 22:4-5

4 In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. 5 They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed

Because God was faithful in the past, I know He will be faithful to me now. He does not change like shifting shadows (James 1:17). I can put my trust in God's past behavior and faithfulness. I verbalize this trust by reminding God what He has done in the past.

♥ What are some specific things God has done for you in the past that you can use to "remind" God of his faithfulness as well as boost your own faith when you are in a hard place?

Have several share. To hear the stories of others builds OUR faith!

What can you do to help yourself remember what God has done for you?

There could be several ideas. Setting a time aside to remember. Keeping a "grateful" journal. Telling someone else so they can remind you when you need to remember God's faithfulness in the past.

9. Besides feeling forsaken by God, what else is the sufferer experiencing? **22:6-8?**

The sufferer is feeling less than human (a worm) because others are mocking him and making fun of his faith in God. No one is compassionate or cares that he is suffering. They think that if God really loves him, he would do something!

People mocking the sufferer because he trusts in God is particularly painful. The mockers are insinuating that either the sufferer really isn't trusting God – even though he says he is – or, that God doesn't really love the sufferer or care about his suffering.

- ♥ When you see someone suffering, what would be a *compassionate* response?
- ♥ Which is worse – to feel that God has abandoned you by being distant and silent or to feel less than human because you are mocked and ridiculed by those around you? Why?
- ♥ Have you ever had people ridicule you for trusting God, especially when God didn't seem to be helping much? Did this tend to strengthen or weaken your faith in God?

10. Even though people around him have turned against him, in what does the sufferer take comfort?
22:9-10

9 Yet you brought me safely from my mother's womb and led me to trust you when I was a nursing infant. **10** I was thrust upon you at my birth. You have been my God from the moment I was born.

God is our Creator and Father. He made us and he was at our birth. He is the one who has been taking care of us since the moment we were born. This fact comforts us because we know that God cannot really turn his back on us.

In the Psalms, we have been given images or word pictures of God as a *Rock*, a *King*, a *Shepherd* and a *Host*, to name a few. Some would suggest that **Psalm 22:9-10** presents the image of God as a *Midwife*. Look closely at these verses and consider how God is like a midwife. Take some time to think about the role, relationship and responsibility of the midwife to the baby before and after birth. In your small group, discuss and develop this interesting image of God. Consider **Psalm 27:10** in your discussion.

This is an interesting image to develop and there will be a variety of insights. Ultimately, it is God who is responsible for us – bringing us into the world, present at our birth and responsible for our well being and care. Even when our human families fail us, God is always there for us.

11. In **22:12-18**, the sufferer describes his *external* and *internal* condition. According to **22:12-13** and **16-18**, what types of things are happening around him that add to his suffering?

Bulls, lions and dogs refer to David's enemies, not animals. The sufferer is being attacked in various ways. He feels cornered and there seems to be no escape. A band of evil men surrounded the sufferer. We are not sure what David meant by saying "they have pierced my hands and feet". Perhaps his enemies, like attacking dogs, wounded him in some way. God used David's poetic allusions to foreshadow Christ being nailed to the cross.

Bulls of Bashan – In David’s time the lush grasslands of Bashan, known today as the Golan Heights, were ideal for livestock. Bashan’s well-fed bulls were famous for their size and, apparently, for their mean disposition. David uses them to describe the meanness of his enemies. (From the *Quest Bible*)

♥ In the Psalms, enemies are likened to a host of dangerous animals. In **Psalm 22**, David uses the metaphor of bulls or wild oxen, lions and dogs. When have you known people to be like the animals described in **22:12-13, 16**? When have you felt like David did?

♥ What is a modern day equivalent of **22:18**? (Hint: When someone is close to death, but not yet dead, what do inconsiderate family members sometimes do?) How does this make the sufferer feel?

I’m sure we’ve all heard stories of family and heirs beginning to divide up and even fight over possessions before the person who is leaving the inheritance is even dead. This is the height of insensitivity. Jesus, on the cross, also endured this treatment.

12. How does the sufferer describe what he is physically feeling because of his enemies in **22:14-15, 17**?

The sufferer poetically describes what he is physically feeling. The sufferer experiences his suffering deep in his physical being. “Poured out like water” and “heart turned to wax” describes the physical response to fear – no strength or ability to fight back. The sufferer can no longer function as a human being. The bones, heart, strength, and tongue fail because of the traumatic response to being hated and alienated. The sufferer is in a state of shock.

Lack of resilience and inability to cope any longer with the trauma of life is brought out in the image of the dried-out “potsherd”. Sherds, found by the thousands in archaeological sites, are pieces of broken pottery. They are basically useless. They are a picture of a broken person who can’t even speak (my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.)

♥ Have you ever been so emotionally upset that it made you feel like what is described in **22:14-5, 17**?

♥ What are some actual physical conditions that might have the symptoms described in these verses?

This is probably a good description of being in a state of shock or deep depression. Your group may have other ideas too.

13. Why does David go into such detail as to what he is *feeling* and *experiencing*? What is the point? How can we benefit from this description?

Because of his detail, we know how deeply the sufferer is suffering and we know what suffering is like. When we suffer, it helps to know that others have suffered too and that we are not alone. We also realize how deeply Jesus suffered for us.

14. What does the sufferer see as the solution to his problems and what specifically does he ask for? **22:11,19-21.**

God is the only solution to our suffering. He is the one who can rescue us. The Psalmist uses the name Yahweh (LORD). Yahweh is the One who keeps his promises and the Strength of his needy people.

15. Notice the mood shift in this Psalm between **verses 1-21** and **22-31**. According to **22:4**, what changed the sufferer's attitude?

God heard his cry for help and did not turn away from him but instead helped him. Yahweh has removed the suffering.

16. In gratitude for God's rescue and deliverance, David wants to host a world-wide feast to honor God. From **22:26-29**, describe what happens at this celebration.

The poor and the rich will eat and be satisfied – everyone in the whole earth will praise God. God will rule all, even the future generations.

♥ If you were to host a feast to celebrate God's grace and mercy to you, what would you say in proposing a toast to our King? Toasts or tributes can be very meaningful and moving. They are a special way of honoring someone. A toast places the attention on the one honored and it demonstrates that the one giving the toast has put some time and thought into what is said. Writing a toast to God can be a wonderful act of worship.

♥ **Psalm 22:30** says that future generations, even those yet unborn, will be told about the Lord so that they, too, can serve God. What can *you* do to make sure this happens?

We teach our children and grandchildren to know and love God. We model for the next generation what loving and serving God look like.

CHRIST IN PSALM 22

Charles Spurgeon, a famous 19th Century English preacher said: *This is beyond all others THE PSALM OF THE CROSS. It may have been actually repeated word by word by our Lord when hanging on the tree; it would be too bold to say that it was so, but even a casual reader may see that it might have been. It begins with, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and ends, according to some, in the original with "It is finished."*

The last phrase of the Psalm, "for he has done it" can be translated "It is finished" – Jesus' words on the cross.

17. Even though David was describing his own suffering, by the power of the Holy Spirit, he was also prophetically describing Christ's suffering. In the chart below, match the Gospel account of Christ's suffering to specific phrases from Psalm 22.

GOSPEL	PHRASES FROM PSALM 22
Matt. 27:39	v. 7 - all who see me mock me ; they hurl insults, shaking their heads
Matt. 27:43	v. 8 - He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him since he delights in him
Matt. 27:46	v. 1 - My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Luke 23:35	v. 17 - people stare and gloat over me
John 19:23, 24	v. 18 - they divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing
John 19:28	v. 15 - my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth
John 20:24, 25	v. 16 - they have pierced my hands and my feet
John 20:17	v. 22 - I will declare you name to my brothers

18. Why, specifically, *did* God *forsake* Jesus? Why is it important to remember this?

Review the meaning of forsake from question 5. Jesus was forsaken by God the Father because he took on himself the individual sins of every human being. It was as if he, himself became the sinner. God turned his back on Jesus as if Jesus was the sinner. Jesus was forsaken because of MY sins.

- ♥ When you are overcome with grief and feeling abandoned even by God, how does it help to know that Jesus also experienced despair and abandonment? What does this fact give you permission to do?

I am not alone in my suffering. Jesus knows how I feel. I know I can ask WHY, because Jesus did. Jesus also acknowledged his suffering.

- ♥ What David wrote centuries before Christ in Psalm 22 was fulfilled in detail during Christ's Passion. What effect does this have on *your belief in God* and his *Word*?

Only an all-powerful and all-knowing God could prophetically predict details that would happen 700 years later. This gives us a picture of how great and awesome God is. He is obviously in control and he knows all about me. Nothing is outside his knowledge. We should have no problem trusting a God such as this.

- ♥ How is **Psalm 22:22-31** a description of Jesus' victory celebration, won by his death and resurrection?

Because Jesus paid the penalty for all sin on the cross and because he rose again, the poor and the rich will eat and be satisfied. All the earth will praise God.

RESPONSE:

19. Imagine Jesus on the cross saying the words in Psalm 22:11-18 and praying the prayer in 22:19-21.

How did God answer his prayer? What does this teach us about our own suffering?

God did hear Jesus' cry for help and he did rescue Jesus, but not until after he died. God let Jesus experience suffering, but then he used the suffering for good. Jesus died, but he also rose from the dead.

God will hear my cry for help and will help and rescue me but this doesn't mean he will immediately alleviate my suffering. He will use my suffering for his glory and my good.

20. Read **Hebrews 2:10-12**, which quotes **Psalm 22:22**. Do you think of Jesus as your "brother"?

What does this relationship mean and why is it important?

Jesus is my brother in that he understands my suffering because he too suffered. He is my brother because he is with me when I suffer. God will use suffering for good in my life, just like he did Jesus

How will you begin to relate to Jesus this way?

Jesus as brother is an intimate relationship. We share everything with him and we run TO him when we are hurting, not AWAY from him.

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.

Matthew 27:39 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads . . .

Matthew 27:43 He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

Matthew 27:46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”—which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Luke 23:35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.”

John 19:23 When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

24 “Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.” This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, “They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.” So this is what the soldiers did.

John 19:28 Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.”

John 20:24 Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”

John 20:17 Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

Hebrews 2:10 In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. 11 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. 12 He says, “I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises.”