

REVIVE US AGAIN



CPWM BIBLE STUDY 2022-2023



CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN



REVIVE US AGAIN PSALM 85:6
Will You Not Revive Us Again, That Your People May Rejoice In You

Psalm 85 is a two-part chapter v2-4 is remembering god's past favors and forgiveness, and v5-8 is begging for forgiveness and grace now.

Revive us again three powerful words. When I hear these words, I go back to the hymn; revive us again fill each heart with thy love, and may each soul be rekindled with fire from above.

Where is the fire, have we lost our fire? Where is the love as we have walked in love, do we still have love in our hearts?

With these questions, we need to first look at our hearts and our love walk. If you are feeling a little empty that is when we let God, the Holy Spirit revive us again. Here are four steps that I feel can help us to revive.

1. God's word- The word is a lamp to my feet and a light for our path. We need to get in the word of God so that when our flame is dimming, we will have a solid rock to stand on. Our lamp will grow dim and our feet will slip but with the word our feet can be grounded on the solid rock.
2. Prayer- Be joyful always pray continually. We need to talk with God, we also need to hear His voice. Be still and know that as we are still, we are able to let the joy of the Lord overflow in us and to others that we encounter.
3. Worship- Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. We need to give God our praises. We need to sing to the Lord a new song and our lips forever give Him thanks.
4. Fellowship- Therefore encourage one another and build each other up. One thing I look forward to is fellowship with like-minded believers. Believers are an important part of the revival. We need to sharpen iron with iron. We have the ability, and now we must put it into action.

We have been called to send, walk in love, and even rise up on the wings of eagles. Now is the time to be revived again. We need the rekindling of our souls; we need the fire from heaven to fill us until we overflow with the love in our hearts. The word again is the assurance that we are a rebellious people. We will need to be revived often, by using these steps we can start to spread the joyful news of our Lord and Savior.



AUGUST - PSALM 85:6

Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?

OPENING PRAYER:

Dear God, thank you so much for the opportunity to share our testimony of being revived with other ladies in our denomination. We are from many walks of life and have had a multitude of experiences, yet we are here together at this time to learn from your word and from the experiences of others. Help us to put aside the struggles and disappointments of our day today and to listen and hear from your word. Guide us as we think on these passages of scripture and help us to see what you would have us to do as we go to take care of all our responsibilities tomorrow. Forgive us for the mistakes we have made and help us to do better tomorrow. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

BIBLE STUDY:

The verse for August is Psalm 85:6: "will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?" (NIV). Psalm 85 seems to be a remembrance of the Lord's faithfulness in the past (verses 1-4); a plea for God's forgiveness and restoration (verses 5-7); listening to the Lord's promise of peace if the people repent (verses 8-9); and faith for a future that looks very bright (verses 10-13).

There are a couple of key words to me in this verse. One is "revive". The other is "again". I first thought of the song "revive us again" (written by William Mackay in 1867) when I read this verse. It is likely that Dr. Mackay had this verse in mind when he was penning the lyrics. This song joyfully praises God for his blessings and asks God to revive his people. We have all probably sung this song with fervor at many services during our lifetime; have we really taken the words to heart?

One definition of the word "revive" is "to make new again—to bring back to the original". Have you ever wanted to "bring back to the original"? I sure have! Maybe you got too close to the curb in your new car and scratched the rims on your low-profile tires. Maybe you got your curling iron too close to your finger and burned your fingernail not realizing until later you had "killed" your nail (don't judge...it was an early morning!). Maybe you burned the dinner you were cooking for your friends whom you had not seen in a very long time. Maybe you said an unkind word that really hurt the other person. Maybe you had a fender bender in your only dependable vehicle. Maybe you have been busy taking care of your many responsibilities with little "time to breathe". Maybe you find yourself in a different yet just as difficult situation. You get the picture...there are many times in our lives that we would like to "go back to the original" and be revived.

The other key word I noticed is "again". The word "again" tells me that God had previously brought his people back



to the original, back to him. It tells me that he loves us so much he wants the best for us. He wants us to keep working on our relationship with him. Not to just get in a rut, but really have a relationship with him that carries us throughout our day. To ask him for help as we go through our day; to be in prayer for our friends, family, etc. Throughout our day. When God's people are revived, they will rejoice in the Lord and their relationship with him will be restored! Oh, what a wonderful promise and reality!

I was able to rejoice in the Lord especially today! At the time of writing this devotional, every aspect of my life has a huge project going on and their due dates are quickly approaching. I have felt slightly overwhelmed. Whenever I feel like this, it seems like I get a special gift from God that reminds me he is taking care of everything! All I have to do is keep following his direction. Today I was driving to a nearby town after a big rain shower, a downpour, when I saw the car in front of me pull over on the side of the road. I thought it odd, since there was no driveway or house near where the car had pulled over. Then I looked ahead and saw it...a double rainbow!!! Not only that, but a whole rainbow and then a double of part of it! I safely pulled over and looked at it, then I safely got out of my car. I just shouted, "hallelujah! It's beautiful! Thank you, Lord for your faithfulness!" I took pictures! It was a wonderful feeling! I was reassured that whatever was going on in my life at that moment was really going to be fine. God cares about all of it! He wants so much for his people to be revived in him, to ask him for help with daily living, to have a relationship with him that grows stronger every day and be a light for him in this dark world.

In Psalm 85:6 the author is beseeching God to forgive his people, to no longer be angry, and bring his people back to him so that their relationship can be restored! How do we go about such a restoration? Prayer, bible reading, seeking God's forgiveness, seeking support from fellow Christians, getting on with doing the work of God. Once God's people are revived, they will again rejoice in him! What a blessing this is for the believer in Jesus!

Thoughts for helping revive your community and your congregation.

These are simply suggestions that came to my mind and may not be applicable to your situation. You may think of others that are not listed here...use your imagination.

*Serve a meal to the widows in your congregation/community. Have a time where they can come and fellowship with each other without having to do anything. Play games (with fun and practical prizes); have a devotional speaker.

*Offer a free meal to members of your community once a month (or whatever schedule works for your congregation).

*Visit a shut-in or call if it is impractical to go in person. Let them do the talking and you do the listening!

*Call/write to a friend or family member whom you have not spoken with in a long time.

*Share your testimony in your church worship service/ local cpwm.

Be aware of how God helps you through your daily life. Thank him for his help!

CLOSING PRAYER:

Hey God! Thanks so much for this time we have had today to read scripture and hear how others have been revived. Guide us so that we may be aware of the needs of our communities and church families so that we can be revived both individually and collectively. Thank you for the many times that you revive me. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

*This study is by Beverly Meinzer
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AUGUST 2022

- *Make plans for attending fall regional meetings:*
Place: _____
Date: _____
- *Make plans for attending regional/synodical retreat:*
Place _____
Date: _____
- *As you plan your meetings, consider ways that Women's Ministry can live out the new theme "Revive Us Again" both near and far away.*
- *Convention voted to support the Stott-Wallace Missionary Offering every fall in regional meetings. Prepare to participate in that offering as a local women's ministry group. Send your donation to Missions Ministry Team and use #34026 to indicate it is a Women's Ministry project.*
- *Other:*
- *Other:*

BIBLE STUDY TOPIC: _____

BIBLE STUDY LEADER: _____

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- **Stay up to date with our happenings in 2022-2023 Women's Ministry, and find valuable resources. Check us out on the website – <https://cpcmc.org/mmt/cpwm/> or to order resources call 901-276-4572 Ext. 252**

SEPTEMBER - PSALM 19:7

The law of the Lord is perfect reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure making wise the simple.



OPENING PRAYER:

Lord, Your law can be difficult to understand and to know how it applies to us today. Help us gain a better understanding of who you are through Your law.

BIBLE STUDY:

In a study like this, I like to dig into several books, commentaries, people.

I'll start with a reference to a Bette Midler song, From a Distance. The words insinuate that God made us, gave us some rules and like the whistle blower at a race, blew his whistle and yelled "GO!" His job is to watch from the sidelines. But that is not the God I know.

The opening verses of Psalm 19 tells us God is constantly speaking to us in a variety of ways.

¹The heavens declare the glory of God
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

²Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.

³There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.

⁴Their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

In them he has set a tent for the sun,

⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom leaving
his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its
course with joy.

⁶Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them,
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

God is constantly showing Himself and interacting with those on earth.

THEN comes our key verse

⁷The law of the Lord is perfect,^[a]
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure,
making wise the simple;

Matthew Henry's Commentary found on Biblegateway.com takes the verse apart in the following way.

The Law of the Lord is PERFECT – Perfectly free
from all corruption

Perfectly filled with all good

Nothing to be added or taken away

CONVERT the soul - To bring back to ourselves,
to our God to our duty

It shows us our sinfulness and misery in our
departures from God and necessity to return to
Him

The Testimony of the Lord is SURE making

WISE the simple

Incontestable and inviolably sure

Confident it will not deceive us

Sure discovery of the divine truth

Sure direction in the way of duty

Sure foundation of living comforts

Sure foundation of lasting hopes

Makes us wise to salvation

Even the simple will be wise. Those sensible of their own folly and willing to be taught, shall be made wise by the word of God as found in Psalm 25:8-9

⁸ Good and upright is the Lord;

therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

⁹ He leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble his way.

I'm thankful to Mr. Henry for breaking down the words in that key verse.

Wisdom comes as we recognize & acknowledge our sinful ways, humbly admit our need for His mercy & grace, and turn to Him. This happens with a close relationship with a living God, not one that watches from a distance.

Often the law is thought of as Old Testament and can be dismissed by the actions of Jesus. But Jesus came to fulfill the law, not abolish it. When the law is combined with the grace of Jesus, there is a whole new dynamic that happens.

Paul says the law had a purpose. We are not justified by the law, rather it was given so we could realize our need for God. We can try to keep the law. We can try to do the right thing. We can try to forgive others, to control our anger, to give beyond ourselves. We can try but only realize we cannot do it ourselves. We fall short. It is important to know the law does not save us, but it is still important in knowing how to live our lives with the grace given by Jesus.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer states in his book, Psalms, The Prayer Book of the Bible the following on page 31.

The three Psalms (1, 19, 119) which in a special way make the law of God the object of thanks, praise, and petition seek to show us, above all, the blessing of the law.

It is grace to know God's commands. They release us from self-made plans and conflicts. They make our steps certain and our way joyful.

Walter Brueggemann in Praying the Psalms (p 57) gives us a tension stated in the Psalms. The law of the Lord is perfect, it is specific, it is life changing. He informs and directs and expects obedience. "The tension is that God gives us permission to choose our futures and, at the same time, God chooses a future for us that is gracious beyond our choosing. This tension must be lived with and not resolved." I see that it encourages us to constantly go back to the Lord for redirection and reaffirmation.

Finally, there is a quote found in the C.S. Lewis Bible (NRSV) in which Lewis declares Psalm 19 is a favorite of his. He is writing a letter to Mary Van Deusen in February 5, 1936.

“My other great favourite is xix. . . . Then the characteristically Jewish feeling that the Law is not only obligatory but beautiful, ravishing: delighting the heart, better than gold, sweeter than honey.”



What better way to learn the ways of the Lord than through His law, His testimony. His wisdom is not piled on us like a dump truck unloads a pile of dirt. It comes in bits and pieces. We eat of His word. Some words are very digestible; others are hard to swallow. But He is patient and kind as we continue to seek.

I'll close with two more verses from Psalm 19:

¹⁰More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.

¹¹Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

Interesting choice of the word “warned”. We are warned that there is great reward to be found here. His perfect law shows who He is and who we are. How wonderful He speaks directly to us. What a great reward indeed.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How different is your thinking of the law when you hear it is the object of thanks, praise, and petition seeking to show us, above all, the blessing of the law?
2. Why do you suppose the psalmist “warns” us about the law’s reward?
3. Write a psalm of thanksgiving for God’s law.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord, Thank You for Your law which is a big part of Your Word. Please continue to help me see You more clearly as I walk in a traumatic world. I need the light of Your law to guide and direct.

Amen

RESOURCES:

- Brueggemann, Walter, Praying the Psalms (St. Mary’s Press, 1982)
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, Psalms, The Prayer Book of the Bible (English translation published by Augsburg Fortress in 1974)
- Matthew Henry’s Commentary from Biblegateway.com
- The C.S. Lewis Bible, NRSV (Zondervan, 2010)

*This study is by Jo Ann Shugert
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SEPTEMBER 2022

- Plan activities for 2022-2023 with the Session and Missions Committee.
- Make plans for activating members and enlisting new members. Give particular attention to the needs and interests of younger women, mothers, and working women.
- Has your local women’s group contributed to the Women’s Ministry fall project yet? Join with women across the denomination in giving this fall to the Stott-Wallace Missionary Offering.
- Other:
- Other:

BIBLE STUDY TOPIC: _____

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OCTOBER - PSALM 22:27

All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nation will bow down before Him



OPENING PRAYER:

Dear Lord, As we prepare to study this devotional, I ask for Your guidance and help in hearing Your Word. Help each of us to realize places in our lives that we need to turn over to You. In Your precious name, Amen.

BIBLE STUDY:

I love studying the book of Psalms. I always think of a little boy named David. He watched his family's sheep each day. He would take his lunch and harp, and while tending his sheep, he would make up songs about the beauty of God's creation. David also wrote poems about the beauty that surrounded him. The book of Psalms could also be called the book of praise. My scripture is Psalm 22:27 "All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nation will bow down before Him."

This implies that man has forgotten God. It represents all the successive generations of the world as but one. They shall be told of God's saving acts. Psalm 18:49 says "Therefore I will praise you among the nations, O Lord, I will sing praise to your name." All humble souls should have a full satisfaction and happiness in Him, those that hunger and thirst after righteousness in Christ. All ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord. And all kindred of the nations shall worship before thee for the kingdom is the Lord's and He is Governor among the nations.

So, this is an evident prophecy of the calling of the Gentiles to the gospel and a clear proof that this Psalm immediately speaks of Christ, to whom alone this and diverse other passages of it belong. They shall remember and turn unto the Lord and all kindred of the nations shall worship before thee. In the New King James Version, Psalm 22:27 says "...all the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord."

For David these words refer to the spread of the news of his deliverance to places far outside of Judah. For the Savior Jesus, these words speak of the eventual spread of the gospel of redemption to all the families of the nations. A fulfillment of God's promise that He would bless all nations through Abraham's descendants (Genesis 12:3). Those who go down to the dust is a common Biblical expression of physical death and decay.

I personally am expecting another great revival. Our nation's people really need a great revival! For about eight years, I was blessed and honored to do Children's Church for Barren Fork Cumberland Presbyterian Church. It made me happy to see the smiling faces

of those children as they came to the front of the Sanctuary to hear and be a part of this message. The group of youth consisted of ages 1 year through 6th grade. I told them Bible stories and stories with good moral values and some that were "whoppers".

We talked about God's creation day by day and how God saw that all He made was good and beautiful. Other Bible stories were: The Good Samaritan, The Prodigal Son, Daniel in the Lion's Den, and David keeping his family's sheep while he made up songs about God's beauty and played his harp. Another good story the kids loved was about the geese and how they took good care of each other, as we humans should do for one another, and many other stories.

At the beginning of the Children's Church, I would open with a "whopper" to get their attention. The adults would also love these whoppers. One whopper was about a little boy looking through the family Bible. He said "Mommie come here see what I found." She said, "What?" He held up a leaf and said, "Adam's suit!"

Another whopper was about a minister who was totally against drinking alcohol. He said, "I wish I had all the whiskey in the world, I would go pour it in the river. I wish I had all the beer in the world, I would pour it in the river. I wish I had all the wine in the world, I would pour it in the river." When he had finished his sermon, he asked the song leader to come forward with the Hymn of Invitation. The song leader came up smiling very big and said, "Get your hymnal and turn to page 243, 'Shall we Gather at the River?'"

After the Covid episode and we were able to come back to the church building, most of my Children's Church kids had advanced to 7th grade. This terminated Children's Church. So, I no longer get to do what I loved and was so blessed to do. However, the children who used to come to front of the Sanctuary to hear a Bible story now actively participate in Youth 5th Sunday Services. On the fifth Sunday of the month, members of the youth group volunteer to serve in all the responsibilities of leading the morning worship service. On that day no responsibility in the service is conducted by an adult. (They often argue over who is going to preach!) Our Youth Leader is in the background giving encouragement. It is a joy to see them actively participate in leading the worship service! I believe part of their willingness to do so comes from the examples they heard during Children's Church and the encouragement of our local church leaders.

I am so proud of our CPWM group at Barren Fork Cumberland Presbyterian Church. We are a small group, but we are very active in church functions and community needs. One of our CPWM special projects is the Fall Bazaar. For fund raising we prepare and sell chicken dinners and fried pies. With the profit from this function, we donate to the needy in our community, to any county charity needs, to our local nursing home, and to the Cumberland Presbyterian Children's Home in Denton, TX.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, our pastor Bro. Alan Meinzer and the Session set up a food program that our CPWM ladies helped with. Each week we would work together to prepare a free meal for anyone in our community and neighboring communities to come enjoy. We prepared this in packages so that people could simply drive up and get a meal to feed everyone in their family, then drive off. By doing this, we were able to see MANY community and church friends that we dearly missed due to the isolation required by the pandemic. We would often receive prayer requests from those who drove through, and we would pray together while they waited for their meals to be packaged. During this time, Bro. Alan and the Session started broadcasting our Sunday morning services on our Facebook page. Many of the people who drove through to pick up a meal said they watched our services every Sunday and received a blessing. We are so thankful for the opportunity to minister to our community in this way! Barren Fork Cumberland Presbyterian Church is very dear and special to me. I have been a part of this church family since 1951. I was so blessed to see my three children saved and join Barren Fork Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and this church family was very instrumental in helping me raise my family. Praise God from Whom all blessings flow!



CLOSING PRAYER:

Our Most Gracious Heavenly Father, I come to You now humbly thanking You for Your loving hands upon me as I tried to say the things that would be in accordance with Your will. I pray those who read this devotion will receive a blessing and be encouraged to continue their relationship with You. In Your precious name I pray, Amen.

*This study is by Willene Bray
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OCTOBER 2022

- *Worldwide Communion Sunday, October 2. Worship resources are available online www.cpcmc.org*
- *Pastor Appreciation Day, October 9. Check out the Pastoral Development website for ideas on ways to express appreciation to your pastor. <https://cpcmc.org/pdmtappreciation/>*
- *Native American Sunday, October 9. Contact Betty Jacob, from Choctaw Presbytery for ways to celebrate in your church. Consider a mission trip to the presbytery for the coming summer. There are lots of ways to connect with our Choctaw members!*
- *World Missions Sunday, October 23rd "You Shall be my Witnesses"*
- *Plan ways to participate in World Community Day, November 4, with the local Church Women United. For ideas and resources check out CWU's website -<https://www.churchwomenunited.net/>*
- *Plan ways for your women's ministry group to support the Stott-Wallace Missionary Fund Offering. Look into the possibilities of a Skype or Facetime visit with a CP missionary.*
- *A Day in the Park will be October 11, 2022, from 10:00 a.m. Till Noon at the Birthplace Shrine in the Montgomery Bell State Park. For more information, contact: Chris Fleming, 615-424-8561, cjfleming@cumberland.org*

BIBLE STUDY TOPIC: _____

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**NOVEMBER - PSALM
51:10**

Create in me clean heart,
O God, and put a new and
right spirit within me.

OPENING PRAYER:

Lord, help us in this study
to see the importance of
confession as opening up to
Your creative work in our heart. Let your Spirit do the
work. Amen.

BIBLE STUDY:

Psalm 51 is a willingness on the Psalmist's part to offer himself to the Lord for a major clean up. This is not the maid coming in to do a quick sweep of the floor and dust off the cobwebs. This is a total make over. The old becomes completely new. Walls come down. It is not without some pain. We need to look at our own sin, and ask ourselves if we really want to have it scrubbed clean.

Specifically, this is David's response to the Prophet Nathan's accusation of David's adultery and murder. He does not start with "Create in me a clean heart". He spends time in self-examination and faces his sin. He acknowledges the sin as a sin against God.

Asking for a clean heart and a new and right spirit was just a part of David's cry to God. There is the need to look at the whole Psalm to see how the writer came to cry out in this way.

Are we bothered by our sins? Are we tormented? Do we make excuses? Or do we just say, "Well I'm not THAT bad, and shrug our shoulders at God's forgiveness?" "Of course, God forgives me – no worry!"

Matthew Henry's Commentary states that David's concern is not with just looking good. His concern is to get his corrupt nature changed: the sin he had been guilty of was an evidence of its impurity and therefore he prays, Create in me a clean heart, O God! He sees now more than ever what an unclean heart he had, and sadly laments it, but also sees it is not in his own power to amend it, and therefore begs of God that he would create a clean heart in him. Only He who made the heart can make it new. Nothing is impossible with Him.

David's recognition of sin was very dramatic. It is amazing how our human nature and our minds work together to blind us from our sin. We make excuses. If only I had not been caught off guard. We may feel bad or even use this as an excuse to not do what God has told us to do.

The Psalmist accepts his guilt. He offers no excuse for his sin other than to say as a human he is prone to sin. He makes the sin his own. He is not just asking for forgiveness, but a new and right – a steadfast spirit, a willing and responsive spirit. He has spent time in self-examination and finds himself wanting. He desperately needs God.



The CS Lewis Bible quotes Lewis from his essay, *The Weight of Glory*, stating that

“real forgiveness means looking steadily at the sin, the sin that is left over without any excuse, after all allowances have been made, and seeing it in all its horror, dirt, meanness, and malice, and nevertheless being wholly reconciled to the man who has done it. That, and only that, is forgiveness, and that we can always have from God if we ask for it.”

In verse 7, David asks to be purged with hyssop. Hyssop was a plant used in the ritual cleansing of persons healed of leprosy. Lev 14:4-6 speaks of dipping hyssop into blood and sprinkling it on the person to be cleansed not once, but seven times. It is not an easy fix, but a process that goes deep.

What sacrifice is acceptable to God? It is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart (v 17).

I am writing this during the middle of March which is also the middle of Lent. I am doing a Lenten study with several other women on a book *Journey to the Cross* by Paul David Tripp. He does an excellent job of taking a deep look at Psalm 51, so I am going to rely heavily on his writings throughout the remainder of this study. The quotes below are taken from his book, Day 19, pages 111-115. So, consider this a partial book report.

Tripp sees Psalm 51 as a “model of the heart of true confession.” We know David's sin. It is two pronged including adultery and murder. If your thought is “Well, any sin I commit is not THAT bad”, think again. Tripp says that David immediately acknowledges his problem is not simply individual sins, but it is “a trifold problem, not just an occasion of wrongdoing.” He claims this because David uses three words within the psalm when he talks about his sin: transgression, iniquity, and sin. Let's look at these three words.

1. Transgression is a “willful stepping over of God's boundaries.” It is seeing the stop sign, but proceeding anyway. It is willful. It is wanting my way more than God's way. It is a “condition of the heart that turns every sinner into a rebel in some way.” That way may be small compared to adultery and murder, but it is sin nonetheless. “Transgression is a spirit of rebellion. True confession confesses to more than weakness; it confesses to the rebellion of heart that causes you to be weak in your struggle with sin.”
2. Iniquity is something “even deeper than a spirit of rebellion that lives in me. It is the thing that causes me to be rebellious.” One thing the law teaches us is that we cannot be wholly clean before God by our own actions. That is why Jesus had to come. Left alone, we are morally unclean. “So confession doesn't just admit to a moment of wrongdoing and a spirit of rebellion, but also acknowledges the moral impurity of heart that is the seedbed of rebellion.”

- Sin is a specific instance of weakness and failure. "It is pulling the bowstring back again and again and every time falling short of the target." "Confession of a specific sin against God and others is an admission of weakness...it is a cry to be rescued from your bondage to yourself."



Recognizing and confessing the three aspects of sin listed above is nothing to be ashamed of. In fact, confession is what opens the door to God's grace and forgiveness. Don't be tempted to confess halfheartedly. As stated above, look fully, completely at your sin. The benefits in doing so are great as talked about toward the end of Psalm 51.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. (13)
 God's deliverance will loosen our tongue to sing aloud of His deliverance (v 14)
 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise.(v 15)

One last thing. I have heard people say, "I know God forgives me, but I just cannot forgive myself." No! I'm afraid this shows little understanding of God's forgiveness and how it affects our whole being. By accepting God's forgiveness I must embrace it myself and be wholly reconciled to myself.

Our life and actions are a witness, but most of us are shy and timid about opening our mouth to share His story in our lives. We realize that even in the results of forgiveness, we need His power and not our own. The whole process of recognition, confession and receiving forgiveness is what opens our tongues and we cannot help but share God's Good News!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Have you ever used the Psalms as "prayer starters"? As you read out loud Psalm 51, interject your personal aspects into the prayer.
- What does it take on our part to get an answer from God for this cry for a clean heart? Does He just do it?
- Allow time to spend quiet time asking God to show us where we have sinned against Him and help to confess.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord, help us to quiet our spirits so we may open our eyes to our deeper sin, acknowledge them and receive your grace and forgiveness. We need you every step of the process. Amen.

RESOURCES:

Matthew Henry's Commentary from Biblegateway.com
 The C.S. Lewis Bible, NRSV (Zondervan, 2010), Psalm 51
 Tripp, Paul David, Journey to the Cross, a 40-Day Lenten Devotional (Crossway, 2021)

*This study is by Jo Ann Shugert
 St. Timothy CPC
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NOVEMBER 2022

- Observe World Community Day, CWU, November 4. This year's theme is "It's up to you in 2022." Visit CWU online for resources - <https://www.churchwomenunited.net/>
- Participate in the Loaves and Fishes Program during the month of November. Visit the Missions Ministry Team's website for resources to help promote it in your church - <https://cpcmc.org/mmt/loaves/>
- Stewardship Sunday, Nov. 6
- Day of Prayer for people with Aids and other life-threatening illnesses. Nov. 13
- Bible Sunday Nov. 20
- Thanksgiving, Nov. 23
- First Sunday of Advent, Nov. 27

BIBLE STUDY TOPIC: _____

BIBLE STUDY LEADER: _____

PLACE OF MEETING: _____

DATE OF MEETING: _____

HOSTESS: _____



DECEMBER-PSALM 63:1

O God, you are my God
earnestly I seek you; my
soul thirsts for you, my flesh
faints for you;
as in a dry and weary land
where there is no water.



OPENING PRAYER:

Lord open our hearts and minds as we study about thirsting for you. Thank you for the Psalms which express so many of our desires, our concerns, our love for you. Amen.

BIBLE STUDY:

This month marks the season of Advent, when we prepare and look for the coming of Jesus, both His first coming and His second. I love that the whole world stops and celebrates Christmas. We can question motives, but it is the one time everyone focuses on Christ-mas. But this time of anticipation, of looking can become so cluttered with shopping, decorations, extra services at church, shopping, parties, family gatherings and more shopping. None of these things is bad within itself. The surrounding land does not seem dry and weary, but rather it appears lush and full so that the taking time to be quiet and look for Jesus gets crowded out.

Let's move for a moment from the cold, winter season of Advent and to the hot, summer landscape.

You are in the garden on a hot, sunny day pulling weeds. You have been doing this for over an hour. It is hard and dirty work. You are on your knees, bent over pulling out weeds that seem to be fighting you. Your water bottle went dry about ten minutes ago. You are so thirsty, but you know if you break for a drink now you may never come back and finish. So, you push on and finish. After another 15 minutes, you pull the last weed, wipe the sweat from your forehead and struggle to stand. You walk into the kitchen and have the cold airconditioned air hit you. It brings relief, but not to your parched throat. You grab a glass and fill it full. You bring it to your lips with the intent of sipping, but you can't stop, so you guzzle. It is like falling backwards into a cool pool of water. Your whole body feels the refreshment. There used to be a TV commercial which labeled this type of experience the "Nestea Plunge".

As you consider this verse, "my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you; as in a dry and weary land", do you ever have this sensation in desiring God? Do I feel so needy, so dry in the spirit, so empty that I long for God and His word? I think we can all say yes to this when we think of times of great need – losing a house to fire, losing a loved one, facing a critical illness. With these and other tragedies we face, we can easily fall on our knees and cry out to God.

But, what about the ordinary, everyday lives we lead? Most days, we can handle things ourselves, or so we think.

It also begs the question – What do I do about it? I lost

my husband, Rich, in early 2021. Life was so different. I cried out to God often asking for His presence, His guidance, His touch. God was and is faithful. But as time went on, I got into a rhythm, took on new responsibilities, filled my time with good, positive things. I realized I did not cry out as much. I was not as dependent on God, not asking at every turn what I should do. I was managing OK, but realized something was missing. How can I continue to cry out to God during a normal day when all is well? It seems funny that it takes effort to do so, but it does. Cultivating a dependence on God takes work. It does not happen automatically. It can so easily slip away.

In the past when I've read the book of Judges, I marveled how every other generation would turn away from God. How could they do that? Did parents not teach their children dependence on God? Stupid parents! Why didn't they do better? Then I had two children who were very independent and for a while went their own way. I was not as condemning of myself as I had been of others. I mean, I did my best by going to church and church activities, praying at home, talking about God often. But, away they went. It took tragedies of their own to see their need for God and lots of time on our knees for my two to seek and return.

I'm not sure how well we would survive being in a constant state of need so great that we are constantly falling on our knees. We also see in the Word how God provides times of celebration, rest and praise. During these times, we each need to find ways to help us keep our focus on God.

- Good challenging devotionals can get us into the Word. If you've used the same one for a while, find something new. Pick one that focuses on scripture and not self-help.
- Listen to hymns or praise music in our homes or car.
- Find someone to pray with on a regular basis. We each pray differently and converse with God differently; it's good to hear others.
- Do "God Talk" with others. Share what is happening in your life and what you hear from God.
- Declare out loud who God is to you. I call this You Are Prayers. It is active. It is now. Declaring out loud affects our spirit and the atmosphere much more than just keeping it in your mind. There is an amazing song that does this. It is You Are sung by HLE from South Africa. The music may be a little different than you are used to. Google for the lyrics and print them out and just read them out loud. Add your own words.

There is a poem by Malcolm Guite from David's Crown, Sounding the Psalms. The book has original poetry based on each Psalm.

Psalm 63: LXIII Deus, Deus meus

For love lifts time into eternity
Kisses each passing moment into life,
Gives us a glimpse of your unfading glory.

We fall away like every falling leaf
But even as we fall we yearn for you.
Our prayers are passing and our blessing brief,

Yet each one reaches deeply into you
For you yourself are reaching into us
To breathe your life in us and make us new;

The barren wasteland is made glorious
With blossoms, breathing an eternal spring
And even at this first world fades from us,

We step into the true world and we sing
A joyful song, for there at last we see
Our heart's desire: our risen Lord and King.

It is also important to realize that as we seek God, He is reaching out to us. Notice the line
For you yourself are reaching into us
To breathe your life in us and make us new.

The seeking is both ways. The yearning is both ways. God yearns for us as well. Oh, how He loves you and me!

The two come together and results in growth and the desire to share this love we have found.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

What works for you when you want to seek more of God?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord, thank you for this Psalm of thirst. Thank you for your openness to us, your desire to have each of us yearn for you. Help us to walk that out in our ordinary, day to day lives. Amen.

RESOURCES USED:

Guite, Malcolm, David's Crown, Sounding the Psalms, (Canterbury Press, 2021)

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DECEMBER 2022

- *Advent, Nov. 27 – Dec.24.*
- *Receive Gift to the King Offering any Sunday in Advent. Materials will be available early fall.*
- *Plan now to observe Human Trafficking Awareness Day on January 11. Order products from Thistle Farms (<http://thistlefarms.org/>) or plan an outgoing to the Thistle Stop Café in Nashville. Order a case of soap from traffickfree.org (<https://www.traffickfree.com>) and organize a hands-on activity with the S.O.A.P. ministry.*
- *Celebrate your Women's Ministry by having a Christmas party. Extend a personal invitation to the women who do not usually participate. This is also a great way to include girls and young women.*
- *Christmas Eve/Christmas, Dec. 24-25*
- *Other*

BIBLE STUDY TOPIC: _____

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JANUARY-PSALM 80:18

ESV - Then we shall not turn back from you; give us life, and we will call upon your name!

New KJV - Then we will not turn back from You, Revive us, and we will call upon Your name.

KJV - So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name.

NLT - Then we will never abandon you again. Revive us so we can call on your name once more.

OPENING PRAYER:

God, our Father, we come today asking you to open our heart and our mind to your words. May we listen, take what we learn, apply this to our daily lives, and when we are overcome with the evil ways of the world may we turn towards God for renewal of our heart and our mind! Humbly, we pray for this renewal, this revival, and ask you, God for your help to cleanse us from thoughts and words which are not from the Holy Spirit within us. Thank you, God, for loving us unconditionally. We are seeking a revival of hope, faith, and love. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen!

BIBLE STUDY:

Do you have or have you had a philodendron plant? A healthy well-cared for philodendron plant will have leaves, rich green color leaves, cascading outside the pot. The leaves reach out towards the sun's natural light or the room's light. You can set a certain day of the week to water the philodendron; however, the best way is each morning to let your fingers rummage through the top of the soil about an inch or so, if there is slight dryness in the soil, this is a sign the plant is thirsty for water. Another indication your philodendron plant either needs less water or more water is the color of the leaves. Leaves showing a yellow color mean this plant has been overwatered; leaves that show brown or have turned brown are a sign the plant needs water. Brown leaves should be removed or plucked off the philodendron. In addition to the brown leaves from the lack of water, the leaves will wilt or droop from the lack of water nourishment. After watering a wilted philodendron plant, the plant will reward you with a perky appearance. Similar to other plants, a philodendron plant will grow larger and produce more vibrant leaves when fertilizer is applied to the soil. Suggestions are to place the fertilizer in the topsoil every 4 weeks during the spring and summer months and every 8 weeks during the fall and winter months. Having this knowledge as well as applying this learning to a philodendron plant should produce a healthy vibrant philodendron plant.



The water and fertilizer are important components for replenishing a philodendron plant just like we need God's guidance and words for replenishment of our life as spoken in Psalm 80:18. Apostle Paul reminds the people to face the Lord to be transformed into His likeness and God's grace is infinite even during our worst times IF we repent, return and reflect the Lord's glory. The worst of times can happen, as this world is hostile in which evil happens and unfortunately, there are people that follow the evil road or wilt from the evil ways. We can wilt or droop from the ways of the world, like the leaves of a philodendron plant wilting from the lack of water nourishment. When this happens, return to the Lord and call on His name so God can restore our mind and our body, like the water and fertilizer provide the restoration to the philodendron plant.

God shows the way of restoration and hope for lives that have gone wrong in Psalm 80, one of the brutal losses of God's people probably after the northern kingdom of Israel was defeated and the deportation of the northern tribes to Assyria. This is a prayer for restoration and revival after experiencing the devastation. God is like the water for the plant: He is the only hope for renewal and salvation! At the beginning of this Psalm, there is a plea to God, the "Shepherd of Israel" to restore and save the people which is followed by a plea for restoration (verse 7).

The writer of Psalm 80 stresses the need for God to restore us, as the writer within these nineteen verses calls on God three times to restore us (Psalm 80:3, 17 and 19). To be restored, we must humble ourselves, turn away from sin and repent of our sins.

Remove the sin, pluck away the sin in the same way we pluck away the brown dead leaves from the philodendron plant. Some sins might be easy to peel away, while another sin might be holding on tightly. Either way, repent and God will help you grab hold of the sin and restore us so we can rise up with renewed strength!

Psalm 80:18 is one of the key verses for our perseverance as Christians and restoration to a healthy vibrant Christian life. This world is hostile where the Evil One and those who serve him rampage and as we live in the broken world, we need to continually remember to reach out to our God, as the philodendron leaves reach out to the light. The Apostle Paul remembers that when anyone turns to the Lord the veil is taken away and as we look at the Lord's face we are being transformed into His likeness with ever increasing glory by Him (2 Corinthians 3:16 - 18). God's grace is inexhaustible even when we are at our very worst IF we will repent, return and reflect the Lord's glory as His face shines upon us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are some ways we can reach out to our Lord, God?
2. Tell how God has nourished you back from a “wilting” (unpleasant) experience?
3. How do you feel after God has renewed your strength?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Father, God, may we have the confidence and courage to reach out to you like the leaves of a philodendron plant reaching towards the sunlight. Even when we make mistakes and wilt away from you, give us the will and the strength to reach out for you, Lord God. May we call on the Lord, so we can receive the Lord’s nourishment and be revived again! In Jesus Holy Name, we find a revival of our heart and mind. Amen!

*This study is by Lynnette “Lynn” Bray
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JANUARY 2023

- *Observe Human Trafficking Awareness Day, January 11. See December’s calendar for ideas!*
- *Observe Martin Luther King Day, January 16. This would be a great time to organize a joint event with your sisters in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America. Contact the CPCA Center for contact information – <http://www.cpcachurch.org/>, 256/536-7481, info@cpcachurch.org.*
- *Make plans to observe and celebrate the Birthday of the CP Church (February 4, 1810) on Denomination Day, February 5. Contact the Historical Foundation for resources - <http://cumberland.org/hfcp/>*
- *Promote the Membership Endowment Program – Perpetual, Diamond Perpetual, Patron, Silver Patron, and Golden Patron. Applications can be found on the Women’s Ministry website. Let us strive to push these endowments over the \$2 million mark in 2023!*



- *Observe Fellowship of the Least Coin with a prayer and an offering. For more information about FLC visit their website - <https://www.fellowshipoftheleastcoin.org/flc>. Your offering can be mailed to the Missions Ministry Team’s office at 8207 Traditional Place, Cordova, TN 38016-7414. Please indicate clearly that it is for Fellowship of the Least Coin.*
- *Make plans for attending spring regional meetings:*
Place: _____
Date: _____
- *Make plans for attending regional/synodical retreat:-*
Place: _____
Date: _____
- *Other*

BIBLE STUDY TOPIC: _____

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**FEBRUARY - PSALM
80:19**

Restore us O Lord God of hosts. Let your face shine that we may be saved.

OPENING PRAYER:

Merciful God, thank you for the community of faith in our church. Strengthen us in prayer. We lift the brokenness of our world for your healing. Help us to share the saving love of Jesus Christ and love our neighbors. Restore us O Lord God of Hosts! Let your face shine that we may be saved! Amen.



BIBLE STUDY:

The book of Psalms comprises 150 ancient Hebrew poems, songs, and prayers. Many of these poems were used by choirs that sang in Israel's temples. Today, hymns are still central in our worship and a way to express thanksgiving, invite God's presence, and learn biblical truths. I love the old, poetic hymns that are full of rich, theological text! I know the words to many of the old hymns by heart having effortlessly memorized them over many years. As I reflect on my lifelong love of hymns, I recognize their profound influence in shaping my beliefs about God.

When I read Psalm 80, I am reminded of the hymn "O God, Our Help in Ages Past". This hymn was written by Isaac Watts in 1708 and later reworded by John Wesley. Through the lens of our Hebrew-Christian tradition, this hymn teaches us to view history as shaped and cultivated by an active God bringing about growth. This hymn proclaims God as the God of history.

Before the hills in order stood,
Or earth received her frame,
From everlasting Thou art God,
To endless years the same.

The God of history is our source of hope for the future.

O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be thou our guard while troubles last,
And our eternal home.

Knowing that God is present and our source of hope in the unfolding events of our world, we turn to God seeking restoration. Psalm 80 is one of the Psalms of communal lament. The Psalms of communal lament express sorrow and regret on behalf of a community or people. These prayers ask for God's intervention and blessing on the life that community members share together.

The life we share together is central to our identity as

God's people. God does not just call individuals. God calls groups of people and teaches us that we belong in community. God is with us and in community, we are with each other. This is fully expressed in the church through which we seek to live together as faithful disciples of Christ.

We are called to be in relationship with God and with our neighbor. When our life together as a community is broken and we are not in a right relationship with our neighbors, the Psalms of communal lament show us how to pray for the restoration of our community, church, and people.

When we pray intercessory prayers, we lay out a situation that confronts us and request God's intervention. Examples of intercessory prayers for communities include prayers for a town that is putting the pieces back together after a natural disaster, a church going through a period of transition, or the plight of people experiencing homelessness within our city. As we become aware of community needs, we sense a call to pray and to take actions to make things better.

In her book, *Praying for Friends and Enemies*, Jane Vennard notes that intercessory prayer and action go hand in hand. Praying for families in our community who are experiencing food insecurity may lead us to collect canned goods for a local food pantry. We feel God's spirit nudging us to do something. Other times we may leap into action and feel God's spirit nudging us to slow down and spend more time in prayer, seeking God's guidance. She observes, "A committed life of service will lead us into intercessory prayer, just as a deep and faithful prayer life will lead us into action." Both are important.

A typical prayer of lament opens by addressing God, presenting a complaint, making a request, and ends with an affirmation of trust remembering God's faithfulness in times past. I invite you to compose your own prayer of communal lament.

- Choose a problem or situation that is particularly troubling to you, your community, or church.
- When you have decided the focus of your prayer, quiet yourself and experience the love God brings into your heart.
- Visualize the situation for which you have decided to pray.
- Sit in quiet reflection. What do you hope for in this situation? What does this community need from God? What intervention do you want? Allow a prayer to form in your heart.
- When your prayer is ended, take a few moments to let the images fade. Bring your attention back to the present.
- Offer your thanks, trust and praise for God's faithfulness and presence.
- Close your prayer by reciting Psalm 80:19. Restore us O Lord God of hosts. Let your face shine that we may be saved.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are your thoughts on God’s call to communities? How have you experienced God’s call as a member of a particular community or in your church?
- 2) What is your rhythm of prayer and action? Do you tend to stay in prayer and resist action? Are you more likely to act and forget to pray?



CLOSING PRAYER:

Loving God, give us eyes to see others as you see them. May we link arms with our brothers and sisters in Christ and live our lives in community as your faithful servants. Strengthen our faith in the sure knowledge that you are at work in the world. Help us to discern the rhythm of prayer and action called for in each season of our lives. Amen.

*This study is by Kathy Wood-Dobbins
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FEBRUARY 2023

- *February is Black History Month.*
- *Observe Denomination Day, February 5.*
- *Elect Convention delegates. Make plans to attend the 2023 Convention and General Assembly in Denton, TX, June 19-22, 2023.*
- *Begin the officer nomination process by praying for current and future officers. Go ahead and get an early start by appointing a Nominating Committee. Make sure you send your new officer information for the 2023-2024 program year to the Women’s Ministry Office by May 1. Report form can be found on the Women’s Ministry webpage- <https://cpcmc.org/mmt/cpwm/>*
- *Observe Ash Wednesday, February 22, Denominational Day of Prayer*
- *Plan now for the World Day of Prayer, March 3. Theme for this event is "I have heard about your faith," based on Eph. 1:15-19. For more information visit-<https://world-dayofprayer.net>*

BIBLE STUDY TOPIC: _____

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MARCH - PSALM 119:107

I am severely afflicted; give me life,
O Lord, according to your Word!

OPENING PRAYER:

Giver of life,
as we come together in the fellow-
ship of other believers,
may our hearts be opened to Your
Holy Word.
May we set aside our worries and
concerns,

Our burdens and hurts,
Our struggles and pangs,

So that we can be restored and revived through this time
together.

Open our hearts and minds to your word and your will.
Speak to us anew this hour

In the name of your precious son, Christ Jesus.
Amen

BIBLE STUDY:

Psalms 119 is not only the longest of all the Psalms; it is the longest chapter in the whole Bible. It consists of 22 stanzas (one stanza for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet). Each stanza is made up of 8 verses. That means, once you do all the math, that Psalm 119 weighs in at a hefty 176 verses. That is a lot of verses. It far exceeds the length of the second longest Psalm, Psalm 70, which has a mere seventy-two verses. For all us not math people, that is less than half the length of Psalm 119. When I printed off Psalm 119 for this study, it came out on five sheets of paper. I even used two columns in a font that required my glasses to read it, in hopes of saving some paper. There is a lot in this Psalm.

As you read through Psalm 119, the author's depth of passion and love of the Word of God is evident from the beginning. Throughout the whole text, the author praises the "Word" of God over and over again. In this Psalm alone, the Hebrew word 'imrah (meaning 'to say' or 'word') is used 19 times. If you add to that count the Hebrew word dabar (meaning 'articulate utterance' or 'to set forth in speech') you come up with a total of forty-two times that the author uses the "Word" of God. That does not even take into account words with similar meanings such as the words for precepts, commandments, statute, or law. Each of those words manages to be used enough to make the Top Ten list of words used in this Psalm on their own, as well. The author of this Psalm expresses a deep love for God's Word through this lengthy poem and, in so doing, gratitude for the Word shines through.

This particular verse, 107, displays the author's gratitude and faith in God's Holy Word. The author expresses a desire to be in-line with God's Word in order to alleviate affliction and to receive renewed life in God. It is through the Word of God that the author hopes to be revived from the perils that are upon him. The author clings to the Word of God for comfort in the midst of struggle and affliction.



"I am severely afflicted; give me life, O Lord, according to your Word!" cries the author.

After the last few years, I think we can all relate to this cry. It has been a long few years in which we have all been faced with great affliction. The afflictions seem to keep coming. The past few years have been filled with struggle. Peril has lain around each corner as we have walked through the unknown of these days, months, and years. No matter where we are or what our circumstances, each of us has walked through difficult times. Some of us have lost loved ones and suffer deep grief. Others have experienced the loss of a job or income for our families. Inflation and stressed supply chain and market have given most of us at least a small moment of pause, if not caused us great worry and concern about how we will make ends meet. The overwhelming nature of what we have faced has left no one unscathed. From political tumult to a worldwide pandemic to the possibility of war, we have experienced so much unease and difficulty. We have been surrounded by loss and uncertainty. We have walked through difficulty and affliction. It has been exhausting.

In the midst of that exhaustion, which for me comes in waves, these words become words of my heart. "Give me life, O Lord." As I have struggled to work towards a new normal, to understand what life post pandemic is going to look like, these words seep out of my heart.

"Give me life, O Lord," seems a perfect cry for these days. Our lives have been on hold in many ways. In other ways, our lives have been forever altered, never to return to the way they were before. We have all been faced with figuring out what our new normal, our new life, will look like. That is a hard task—again, exhausting. So many questions and choices lie before us as we explore this new unknown; as we navigate our new normal.

- What does life after a worldwide pandemic look like?
- Will we ever get eat in restaurants without worry again?
- Will it be safe to go out in large groups in public without masks?
- Will we be able to send our kids away to overnight camp?
- Will working from home be the standard way of working?
- What will preschool, elementary, high school, and even college look like for our children?
- Will we ever worship as a full congregation in the same space at the same time?
- Will virtual worship become the new normal?

A cry from the heart, "Give me life" – restore to us life giving forces; energy, purpose, understanding--revive us, O God, and give us new life in your Holy Word.

I find some comfort in knowing that our affliction is not unique. Others before us have struggled. Others have been afflicted. Periods of suffering and affliction are not new to our age, although our perils are quite unique to us. Throughout the Bible and throughout history, we hear the stories of affliction. The Old Testament pours out the pain, suffering and affliction of the Hebrew people over and over again. But it also details humanity's ability to overcome the pain, suffering, and affliction. This links us together—broken people of God, wandering in the desert, guided by a loving God. That can give us direction and hope in the deepest of our afflictions. Others suffered before and they found ways to move forward—out of the pain, out of the affliction, out of the suffering.

The Psalmist reminds us that in the midst of affliction and suffering, the people found comfort in the Word (statutes, commandments, precepts and utterances) of God. We too can find the same comfort in the Holy Words of a loving God. We, too, can use the words of the Psalmist to cry out in our affliction and ask for God's comfort and life.

“Give me life, O God, according to your Word!”

Sometimes using the words of someone else can help us speak our own truth in ways that we cannot express ourselves. Sometimes, when our hearts are too heavy or our worries too deep, we can turn to Scripture (especially the Psalms) and find the pleas of our own hearts from words spoken generations before us. Now, I am not one for meditation. My mind moves too fast. When meditating, I struggle to calm it, no matter how much I practice. I am also not one for journaling. Try as I may, it is just not my thing. However, I have found that when life seems overwhelming and my affliction great; when I struggle to calm my spirit and my soul; the practice of playing with Scripture has brought me peace.

I am a visual person, so a few years ago I bought myself a journaling Bible. This Bible also had pretty pictures that you could color alongside the text. I would use this Bible to help settle my soul. It was in the Psalms that I found the most comfort. I went through two of these Bibles—coloring and reading my way through times in which it was hard to come by peace.

Coloring may sound like a pastime of the young, but there is something soothing in the motion and something creative in the release of design. Using the words of the Psalmist and turning them into the meditation of my heart helps me to step away from my own affliction and dive into God's Holy Word, which has the deep ability to restore and renew.

You can Google ‘Scriptural coloring pages’ and a plethora of options will appear. I would challenge you to give it a try. Find a Scripture that revives your soul and see there is a coloring page for it. Print off. Color away. I encourage you to take a few moments and get lost in the beauty of the Word. Find comfort and solace in the page and may the Word of God revive you again!

CLOSING PRAYER:

Holy God, revive us again through your Holy Word. Whis-

per your peace and comfort to us through your ancient text. May we find retreat and strength in your Word as the Psalmist did.

May we lean on the words of your children before us to find our own strength and courage in the midst of our afflictions.

We have faced many perils and afflictions.

The journey before us seems long and daunting.

Revive us again through your Holy word.

Amen

*This study is by Abby Cole-Keller
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MARCH 2023

- Celebrate the wonderful gifts of women this month, National Women's History Month.
- Pray for Cumberland Presbyterian clergywomen. Invite a clergywoman to your meeting, your regional gatherings, or to preach on Sunday.
- Observe World Day of Prayer, March 3.
- Look for ways in which your group can contribute to the Spring Project sponsored by CP Women's Ministry. Visit the Women's Ministry website for more information on funding needed-<https://cpcmc.org/mmt/cpwm/>
- Observe National Farm Worker Awareness Week, March 25 - 31. You might want to host a "Harvest of Justice" event. Visit their website for information on this event as well as other resources – www.nfwm.org

BIBLE STUDY TOPIC: _____

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APRIL - PSALM 119: 154

Plead my cause and redeem me; give me life according to your promise!

OPENING PRAYER:

God, thank you for your loving kindness and presence in every season of our lives. Open our hearts and minds to your Word. Give us life according to your promise! Amen.

BIBLE STUDY:

None of us are exempt from the uncertainties that come with living a life. As human beings, we are wired to crave certainty and security. We do our best to plan for contingencies. Day by day we make choices determining the best course of action in complicated situations. We discern how we approach our relationships with others and choose where we focus our attention. It is tempting to believe that we are always in the driver's seat. But, if we live long enough, we all experience what it's like to face circumstances beyond our control. We arrive at the end of our rope. We may find ourselves confronting a bitter disappointment, a serious illness, the loss of a loved one, or stresses we did not imagine would be a part of our experience.

The Psalms teach us that a passionate expression of anguish is an appropriate response to the sorrows and hardships we experience. They teach us to take our laments to God in prayer. God can hear all our prayers, even the ones that seem brutally honest. We can plead our cause before God and join the psalmist in begging God for life according to God's promises. In her book *Good Enough*, Kate Bowler exclaims "Blessed are we who discover we are loved and held in arms that are strong enough to hold that which we cannot."

In Psalm 119:154 we hear a plea for redemption. Redemption takes that which is broken and wrong turning it into something better. It prevents a situation from being as bad as it might be. Redemption intervenes when bad actions are leading to bad consequences and offers change. It doesn't erase the past, but it changes things moving forward. The Bible is full of redemption stories such as the story of the prodigal son, the parable of the lost sheep, and Saul's encounter on the road to Damascus. Redemption turns us toward a life rich with God's promises including the promise of joy.

While we are not exempt from life's hardships, neither are we exempt from its joys. Hardships have a way of commanding our attention. God's love reminds us that we more than our hardships. We are redeemable! Even when we feel diminished by sorrow, there's a lot of us left to love.

Have you experienced unexpected joy during a difficult time? Perhaps your family has said good-bye to a beloved elder and welcomed a new grandchild. Joy and sorrow can exist together. The following poem by Persian Poet Hafiz reminds us that as God's beloved children, we are made for joy.

I sometimes forget
that I was created for Joy.

My mind is too busy.
My Heart is too heavy
for me to remember
that I have been
called to dance
the Sacred dance of life.

I was created to smile
To Love
To be lifted up
And to lift others up.

O' Sacred One
Untangle my feet
from all that ensnares.
Free my soul.
That we might
Dance
and that our dancing
might be contagious.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are some things that bring you joy? What ensnares you or stands in the way of experiencing joy?
- 2) What does the word redemption mean to you? Which Bible story stands out for you as you think about redemption?

CLOSING PRAYER:

God, thank you for your sustaining presence in our lives during our most difficult days. Help us to remember that we are not alone and can turn to You as our anchor in a storm. Give us life according to your promise! Be with us in our singing, our laughter, and our dancing. Amen.

*This study is by Kathy Wood-Dobbins
Brenthaven CPC
Nashville Region*



APRIL 2023

- *Palm Sunday, April 2.*
- *Maundy Thursday, April 6.*
- *Good Friday, April 7.*
- *Easter, April 9.*
- *Celebrate Earth Day, April 22, at some point during this month. Plant a tree or flowers, clean up a park, start a recycling program, or make the switch to real coffee mugs for your Sunday morning coffee time!*
- *Pray for the upcoming Women’s Ministry Convention and General Assembly to be held in Denton, TX., June 19-22.*
- *Elect officers for 2023-2024 (to serve September 2023 – August 2024).*
- *Submit your Annual Report Form to your Regional President and the Director of Women’s Ministry (8207 Traditional Place, Cordova, TN 38016-7474). Report forms can be found on the Women’s Ministry website and are due in by May 1.*
- *Other*

BIBLE STUDY TOPIC: _____

BIBLE STUDY LEADER: _____

PLACE OF MEETING: _____

DATE OF MEETING: _____

HOSTESS: _____



MAKE SURE TO GET YOUR ANNUAL REPORT FORM INTO YOUR REGIONAL PRESIDENT AND THE DIRECTOR OF MINISTRY WITH WOMEN. IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO SEND THE CORRECT INFORMATION FOR THE INCOMING OFFICERS WHO WILL SERVE FROM SEPT 2023 – AUGUST 2024 (NAME, ADDRESS, PHONE NUMBER, EMAIL ADDRESS.) REPORTS ARE DUE BY MAY 1.

MAY - PSALM 119:25

My soul clings to the dust;
revive me according to your
word.

OPENING PRAYER:

Renewing God,
as we gather during this time,
may your Spirit draw ever nearer.
Through our fellowship, may we be revived again by your
Holy Word
and may our faith be strengthened as we study together.
Open our hearts and minds this hour.
Amen

BIBLE STUDY:

As you may already know, Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. The length of this Psalm has a reason behind it. Psalm 119 is an acrostic poem. If you are like me, this part of English class has escaped you. So, I will give you a quick refresher. An acrostic work is one in which the initial letter of each line, phrase, or unit, when taken together, creates something meaningful. In the case of Psalm 119, the author creates the Hebrew alphabet with the initial letter of each stanza.

You might have come across an acrostic when working through a mind puzzles book or in the newspaper puzzle section. Throughout 2020, to pass the time and to give my youngest daughter a little more to stimulate her mind than the online school was providing, we would work through mind puzzle books that I would pick up at the grocery store. We would stretch our mental muscles every evening together to help her mind wind down before bed. Acrostics often scattered the pages. They were one of my favorites. We would work diligently to answer the questions and, if we were correct, the first letter of each answer, when read going down, would spell a different word answering the overall question. This would assure us the other answers were correct. An acrostic!

Psalm 119 is an example of an alphabetic acrostic. It starts with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet—“alef”. Then each following stanza begins with successive letters of the alphabet until the last letter—“taw”. Thus, Psalm 119 is literally an A to Z ode to God. While most Hebrew alphabetic acrostics are only twenty-two lines, Psalm 119 is one hundred and seventy-six lines - eight times longer than most. This is because the author uses eight lines per letter to express devotion to God. In some Bibles, you will note, each section of eight will be marked by the Hebrew letter that the lines in each stanza begin with in the original Hebrew text.

In the Bible, acrostic works only appear in the parts of the Bible that were originally written in Hebrew - the Old Testament. Since the Hebrew Bible was originally an oral tradition and not a written text, being able to remember the text in its entirety required a few tricks. Acrostic poetry was one of those tricks. Using an alphabetic acrostic aided with the memorization of the text as did using poetry in general. By associating each stanza with a letter



of the alphabet, the poem was easier to remember as it passed down from person to person and generation to generation.

There are other acrostics used throughout the Old Testament. Another popular example, although you may not realize it, is Proverbs 31:10-31, often referred to as the Virtuous Wife Scripture which was popularized especially by the rise of 31 Bags (which I bet you have a few of!) a few years ago. This section of Proverbs 31 is indeed twenty-two verses long. Each verse begins with one of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet to complete the Hebrew alphabet. An alphabetic acrostic! Other examples include Psalms 25, 34 and 145.

While alphabetic acrostics are found throughout the Old Testament, Psalm 119 is the most popular. C.S. Lewis notes of this Psalm, that it “is not, and does not pretend to be, a sudden outpouring of the heart...It is a pattern, a thing done like embroidery, stitch by stitch, through long, quiet hours, for love of subject and for the delight in leisurely, disciplined craftsmanship.” The length of the Psalm makes it stand out, for sure. The beauty with which the author crafts the poem is skillful, a true crafted work of art.

Lewis compares the crafting of Psalm 119 to the art of embroidery. My oldest daughter decided to teach herself to embroider about a year ago. With many hours on the internet, many instructional videos on YouTube, and a kit from Amazon delivered right to our door, she was rapidly off and running. Nowadays I will look up and see her working diligently with a needle in hand to create a beautiful picture from string and fabric. When I watch her work away, stitch by stitch, over long, quiet hours, I see her relax away. I see her focus narrow in on creating the picture before her. I watch as her worries wither away. The concerns of the world melt into the distance, if only for a little while, as she concentrates on the task before her. She can stitch a beautiful picture onto the blank canvas. She uses string, a needle, and knots to create something from nothing. It is fun to watch.

Now, I am not one for embroidery, especially as my eyes get older. However, I can crochet and occasionally pick up a hook. I find something comforting in the repetitive motion of the crochet hook moving through the yarn. My mind is somehow soothed when I create something new from nothing. I face a sense of accomplishment as I watch a plain old bundle of yarn turn into a blanket, hat, or scarf. In the midst of a world that seems so chaotic, it is nice to bring some measure of order to something...anything...even a bundle of yarn.

Being creative and creating- whether it is a piece of art, a work of embroidery, a beautiful acrostic poem, a painting, a piece of pottery, or a beautiful dance-can revive our souls. Getting lost in art can bring us back to a place of peace, calm, and a sense of being centered. Art can revive us again and again.

The author of Psalm 119 uses words to craft a piece of art that revives his soul. The work of the Psalmist took effort and energy to ensure that it was easy to pass down

in a memorable prose - a labor of love which I am sure soothed his soul.

“My soul clings to the dust;
revive me according to your word.”

While the Psalmist used words to revive his soul, God has given us a host of different ways to express our creative energies. For my daughter, it is embroidery. For my niece, it is knitting and growing plants. For a friend of mine, it is punch needle art. For myself, it is crocheting.

As adults some tend to shy away from doing hobbies, especially arts and crafts. Maybe that is because it feels childish or unproductive. Maybe it is because life becomes too busy. Maybe it is because we are taught to not focus on ourselves. But creativity is a gift from God that we are meant to use.

When we allow ourselves to open up our creativity, by whatever means speaks to our own hearts, we can restore to ourselves little bits of hope, joy and energy.

When we can create beauty amid the hard; when we bring a small piece of order the chaotic world; when we allow ourselves to step out of the craziness that surrounds us; we can breathe a little deeper, if only for a few moments, and allow ourselves to be revived.

God wants our hearts to be whole, restored and revived with energy. So often we cling to the dust of the earth. So often we get lost in the mud and muck of the world around us. But God wants to revive us. God wants us to find joy, energy, and hope in the world no matter how messy and overwhelming the world may seem. God wants us to be joy, energy, and hope in the world, especially in the messy and overwhelming. As we seek ways to find that joy, energy and hope in a world that is full of mud and muck, dirt and dust, we might just try tapping into our creative side and see what we can find.

The Psalmist used poetry to find his calm in the storms and to express his love for God and God’s Holy Word.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Where can you find that space for expression?
2. What passion can you step into that will restore and revive your soul?
3. Is there a hobby you enjoyed as a child that you would like to start again?
4. Is there a craft that you always dreamed of picking up, but never started? Why wait? Start now.
5. Make room for creativity and you might just open a door and make space to be revived again!

CLOSING PRAYER:

Holy God,
Open our hearts, minds, and hands to You.
Help us to find ways to sink into our own joys
and express our own creativity. As we do so, may we

find Your joy, energy and hope and may we be restored through Your creative powers to face all the dust, dirt, and dinge that clings to us with new power. May we be revived through you once again.
Amen

*This study is by Abby Cole-Keller
New Bethel CPC
Greeneville, TN
Tennessee/Georgia Region
Scattered Seeds Worship.org*



MAY 2023

- *Make sure to get your Annual Report form into your Regional President and the Director of Women’s Ministry. It is **VERY IMPORTANT** to send the correct information for the incoming officers who will serve from Sept 2023 – August 2024 (Name, address, phone number, email address.) **REPORTS ARE DUE BY MAY 1.***
- *Observe May Friendship Day, CWU, May 3.*
- *Receive the Convention Offering –Please check out the website for more information on this opportunity-<https://cpcmc.org/mmt/cpwm/>*
- *Pentecost, May 28. Celebrate the Stott-Wallace Missionary Fund Offering and send into the Missions Ministry Team (8207 Traditional Place, Cordova, TN 38017. Indicate that it is “Stott-Wallace Offering”) If it is an offering given by women’s ministry, make sure that is clearly noted because we are attempting to track giving by women’s ministry groups, use #34026 to identify your donation as a women’s group.*

BIBLE STUDY TOPIC: _____

BIBLE STUDY LEADER: _____

PLACE OF MEETING: _____

DATE OF MEETING: _____

HOSTESS: _____

JUNE - PSALM 139:14

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well!

OPENING PRAYER:

O, God who knit us together in our mother's womb,
You who know us more intimately than any other,
We come to you just as we are—
worn and weary--
curious and cautious--
open and willing.
Meet us here.
Guide us in this space
Lead us into Your Holy Word
Revive us again.
Amen

BIBLESTUDY:

The 139th Psalm is one of my favorites. The personal nature of this text makes it relatable in a way that other Psalms are not. Throughout this text, the Psalm uses language between the author and God which creates an intimate picture of God's relationship to us; one in which we are fully and completely known. This intimate language allows for the Psalm to present a connective nature between God and the reader in a way that most of the other Psalms do not. With this intimacy, however, comes both comfort and unease. To be known so deeply, so openly, so wholly, can be both comforting and scary. Yet, if we can step into that fear and allow ourselves to accept God's knowing of us, we can move closer to becoming the fearfully and wonderfully made creatures that God knows us to be. When we can accept the love of a God who sees us completely and trust in that love, we move forward into all that God created us to be; all that God desires us to be; all that God knows we can be! We must work towards accepting that we are the wonderful works that God made.

The intimate imagery used throughout this Psalm creates the picture of a deep bond between God and, not just humanity, but each of us individually. Beginning with the declaration that God has "searched me and known me" in Verse One, this Psalm reaches out to a personal God—a God who knows our every move—a God who discerns our thoughts and knows our ways, maybe even more so than we know ourselves. There is not a word we utter that God does not know. There is not a thought we can think that God does not know. This Psalm tells us of a relational God who knows us so deeply, so wholly and so intimately that we cannot escape being known.

God knows us so well even from the very beginning. God created us in the darkness of our mothers' wombs. God knit each of us together one stitch at a time. God is woven into our very being. This is a God so involved in our being that God knit us together with God's own hands. What a wonderful image! We are so known by God that



God was there from the time that our cells first collided in the darkness of our mothers' wombs. How beautiful!

"I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well."

Being so known can be scary. I don't know about you, but there are some thoughts that go through my head that are best left right there—in my head. People always comment about what a quiet man my father was. I assure them that it was simply because my mother advised him that if he didn't have anything nice to say, he should say nothing at all. There are moments when I dig into the pint of ice cream in the carton with a spoon that I would rather not share with others. There have been too many parenting moments when I was not my best self, and I am thankful they were behind closed doors.

To be known deeply and wholly by another can be scary. Yet despite knowing us so intimately- the good, the bad and the ugly- God loves us anyway. God knit us together as God's beautiful and wonderful work, a reflection of God, each of us—fearfully and wonderfully made.

I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

We are fearfully and wonderfully made!

You are fearfully and wonderfully made!

Those words are, indeed, hard to hear and even harder to believe, at times. To believe that I am fearfully and wonderfully made, can be a real struggle! Wonderfully made? In the middle of my messy house and unwashed hair? Fearfully made? As I try to figure out how to navigate myself and my family through these unprecedented times? Wonderfully made? Even in the yoga pants I haven't changed out of in a few days, a sink full of dishes that never seem to end, and laundry piled all around? Fearfully made? Even as I fumble through raising teenagers making more mistakes than I care to count, and living in fear with each breath they take?

Yet the words of the Psalmist are true. Each of us—you—me—all of us are fearfully and wonderfully made. Knit together by God's own hands, in God's own image.

Cling to that! In the midst of the full sink and yoga pants, in the midst of raising littles and not so littles alike, with the messy house and messy hair, hear those words. YOU are fearfully and wonderfully made.

I have just moved into my forties. While some do not look forward to this milestone, I have been looking forward to my forties. In my first call to the ministry, I worked with older adults. What a great job! I was blessed with the opportunity to hang out with people who hovered around and above the retirement age. In my early twenties, they would always assure me the best was still to come. As I was chasing my little ones all around, they would smile and say, "It gets better." This eventually led to discussions about when that "better" would begin. Overwhelmingly, I heard that people favored their forties.

In their forties, careers were stable; kids were more self-sufficient, if not out on their own, and marriage had settled into a comfort. But most importantly, people found that in their forties they finally felt that they had found themselves and come to terms with who they were.

I would hear how your forties were a time when you really stepped into who you were meant to be. They had gained experience from their mistakes in the younger years. They had gained confidence through their successes. In their forties they had somehow found a way to step into their true selves and I longed for that. So, as I entered my forties, this has been my goal: to let go of the insecurities of the past (of which there were many) and step into the self confidence that God desired for me, believing that I am fearfully and wonderfully made by a God who knit me together in my mother's womb and whose works are indeed wonderful. I am one of those works. You are one of those works, fearfully and wonderfully made. This I know!

There are high expectations these days.

These expectations can be hard to navigate. Deciphering what is real and what is not can be difficult terrain, indeed. In a world of Facebook, Instagram, Tik-Tok and Twitter, it can be hard to live up to what we see. In a world where people present themselves in short videos with perfect snippets and communicate through 280 characters or less, our self-doubt can creep up all too easily. Voices of imperfection can seep in. Our feelings of "less than" and "not enough" can gallop forward. However, knowing and trusting that God knows our enter thoughts and dialogue, every flaw, every worry, every concern, and God loves us still, can restore us and help us move forward into the fearfully and wonderfully made women God knit us together to be.

Letting go of insecurity is not easy. From my weight to my general appearance, there are moments of insecurity. From my parenting abilities to my career goals, insecurity still sneaks in. Quieting those old voices, those human voices, those words of "not enough", "not perfect", "not ideal" that sneak in, can be hard. But replacing those words with the words of this Psalm help to squelch those insecurities-knowing, and believing, that I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

This Psalm speaks to a God who knows us so completely. There is no thought we can have that God does not know. There is no hiding spot where God cannot locate us. There is no move we make that God does not see. God knows us wholly and deeply. God knows our rising up and our lying down. There is no distance we create, no length we can run, where God cannot reach us. God knows our insecurities and our imperfections, and GOD LOVES US STILL! God loves us despite knowing us wholly and completely. If God loves us then shouldn't we love ourselves, wholly and fully? We are fearfully and wonderfully made by God's own hands. Let us step into that knowledge for "Wonderful are your works; my souls knows it very well!" O, God. Let us believe it. Let us live it!

CLOSING PRAYER:

Creator and sustainer God, You knit us together in our mother's womb. You created us in your image. You know us deeply and completely. You love us still. Help us to accept ourselves as the fearfully and wonderfully made women you created us to be. Help us to see our beauty. Help us to step into our fearless nature. Help us to love ourselves as deeply as you love us. Amen.

*This study is by Abby Cole Keller Abby Cole-Kellar
New Bethel CPC
Greeneville, TN
Tennessee/Georgia Region
Scattered Seeds Worship.org*



JUNE 2023

- *Have intercessory prayer for the meeting of Convention and General Assembly, June 19-22, Denton, TX.*
- *Send your Convention Offering to the Missions Ministry Team if you did not have a delegate or representative attend.*
- *Volunteer to help with Missions Education during your church's VBS ministry. Plan a visit by a missionary via social media. Pick a different country each day to highlight. Learn songs in other languages. Collect a VBS offering for the Stott-Wallace Missionary Fund.*
- *Other:*

BIBLE STUDY TOPIC: _____

BIBLE STUDY LEADER: _____

PLACE OF MEETING: _____

DATE OF MEETING: _____

HOSTESS: _____

**JULY - PSALM
139: 23**

Search me O
God and know
my heart! Try
me and know my
thoughts!

**OPENING
PRAYER:**

God, you know us better than we know ourselves. Thank you for your unconditional love. Teach us to come before you with open hearts inviting your redeeming presence in all parts of our lives. Amen

BIBLE STUDY:

One of my favorite children's books is Margaret Wise Brown's *The Runaway Bunny*. It is the story of a bunny who tells Mama Rabbit that he wants to run away. The bunny determines that he will become a fish so he can swim away, but Mama Rabbit promises to be a fisherman and catch him. He then decides to be a mountain climber and she tells him she will climb with him. He tells her he will become a bird and she is quick to reassure him that she will be the tree that shelters him. The bunny finally decides that he will be a little boy so that he can run away, and she responds that she will become his mother "so that I can catch you in my arms and hug you!" "Shucks," says the bunny. "I may just as well stay where I am and be your little bunny."

Each time I read Psalm 139 I think of that little bunny. The Psalmist asks, "is there any place I can go to avoid your Spirit? If I climb to the sky, you're there!" God knows us inside and out. How amazing it is to be fully known and fully loved by God! Truly nothing can separate us from God's love. Like the psalmist we can confidently exclaim, "Search me O God and know my heart" because no part of us is beyond God's reach.

Truth be told, we hesitate to search and know our own hearts and minds. It can be difficult to acknowledge our feelings especially those we consider bad or that make us feel miserable. In an episode from the TV comedy, *The Simpsons*, Marge offers Lisa some terrible advice: "Push the bad feeling down, down, down until you are standing on it. Then, smile."

We know that ignoring negative feelings doesn't make them go away and may even cause them to be expressed in other ways. Holding on to negative feelings can rob us of our sense of perspective and keep us from the fullness of life offered to us as disciples of Christ. Acknowledging our feelings is not only good for our mental health, but it also has a theological dimension. Psalm 139 teaches us to invite God to know our heart and thoughts. We do this not because we are blameless but because we are loved. When we invite God's presence into our interior lives through prayer, we begin to loosen our grip on resentments that ensnare us, steal our joy, and lead us to reacting in ways that make things worse.



A contemplative spiritual practice that invites God into our emotional lives is The Welcoming Prayer. This is a form of prayer through which we welcome God's presence and action in our emotional reactions to life events and situations. It is important to note that this is not a prayer that welcomes the events that trigger difficult emotions such as being treated unfairly or experiencing physical hardships. It is a prayer that simply accepts where we are emotionally even if we don't consider it to be a good place. The prayer moves us away from fighting, avoiding, or attaching a story to an uncomfortable feeling. In the presence of a compassionate God, we acknowledge our feelings as they pass through us and embrace the fact that we are feeling them.

Here is an example of a prayer written by Bob Hostetler posted in *Inspirational Prayers*, Guideposts.org. God, hear me and answer me. You know that I am troubled with thoughts and feelings of anger, resentment, and bitterness. You also know why. And you know how deep the hurt goes and how long I have lived with it. But I don't want to live with it any longer. I don't want to be an angry, resentful, and bitter person. With Your help, I release my anger into Your hands I surrender my resentment. I let go of my bitterness. Help me to keep letting go."

Theologian Richard Rohr shares the following guidance for praying The Welcoming Prayer. Begin by acknowledging a difficult feeling that has surfaced for you. Notice how this feeling shows up in your body. You may notice a quickening of your heartbeat or clenching of your jaw. Pay attention to the sensations in your body. You may find your attention jumping into your thoughts or replaying the event that has caused the anger or hurt. Instead, focus on the physical sensation of the feeling and take a few deep breaths.

After you identify the feeling in your body, sit with it a minute and focus on your breath. Simply feel the feeling. Stop fighting it. For a moment, stop trying to understand and stop blaming. Imagine God lovingly accompanying you in this moment and holding your hand with empathy, grace, and love. Allow a prayer to form in your heart. God, I give you my fear, my anger, my disappointment. Spending a few moments with an uncomfortable feeling is hard to do, but when we name it and feel it, we are more able to let it go. Slowly transformation can begin.

The Welcoming Prayer can be done in a moment, even in just a breath. In fact, this prayer is sometimes called Prayer-on-the-Go. As a difficult feeling arises, turn it into a welcoming prayer. Welcome God into whatever comes your way by allowing the feeling, sharing it in prayer and letting it go.

The practice of letting go is not final. We feel things again and again. With practice, facing into feelings and invoking God's presence can help us to grow. Bringing our emotions into our prayer life helps us to grow in wisdom. Our feelings maybe signaling something important, and prayer can help us to discern what that might be. Perhaps something needs to change in our

lives. Like the psalmist, may we invite God to search our hearts and know our thoughts with the sure assurance that we cannot run away from God's love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are some reasons that might keep us from being totally honest with God about our feelings when we pray?
- 2) How do you respond to the idea of sharing your negative feelings with God in prayer?



CLOSING PRAYER:

Loving God,

Thank you for your presence and for knowing our hearts. May we become more aware of the goodness you see in each of us as your children. Teach us to see others through your eyes. Give us the courage to welcome the wide array of emotions that we experience and place them in your care. Help us to let go of bitterness, shame, and fear as we grow in wisdom and love. We pray these things trusting in the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Amen.

*This study is by Kathy Wood-Dobbins
Brenthaven CPC
Nashville Region*



JULY 2023

- *If you did not receive your Stott-Wallace Missionary Fund Offering on Pentecost do so this month. How did you celebrate the offering in your church? Share your ideas on the Missions Ministry Facebook page.*
- *Organize a "Girl's Day" or "Girl's Night Out" to spice up your Women's Ministry. Invite teen girls/young adult women and go for pedicures. Meet for lunch at a café. Do something different this month.*
- *Consider a Women's Work trip for your local church. Organize a short work trip and invite the other women in your region along for the experience. Don't forget to include the 'tween and teen girls. If you aren't up to a trip away from "home," consider something nearby!*
- *Plan for officer's preparation (see Resource Manual or the Women's Ministry website). Talk with your regional officers about doing a region-wide officer's training event.*
- **NEW** *Women's Ministry resources can be found on the website (<https://cpcmc.org/mmt/cpwm/>) or call the office at 901.276.4572.*
- *Cumberland Presbyterian Children's Fest (CPCF) will be in July at Bethel University, McKenzie, Tennessee. This event is for CP children K-6th grade. For questions, contact Jodi Rush jhr@cumberland.org*

BIBLE STUDY TOPIC: _____

BIBLE STUDY LEADER: _____

PLACE OF MEETING: _____

DATE OF MEETING: _____

HOSTESS: _____



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