



Blessed Is the Man

A Man's Journey through the Psalms

Psalms of Divine Wisdom

.....

Praise the LORD!
Blessed is the man
who fears the LORD,
who greatly delights
in His commandments!

Psalms 112:1

S A M P L E



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Meet Our Authors

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Tim, his wife Lea Ann, and their five-year-old daughter, Claire, reside in Lubbock, Texas, where Tim serves as senior pastor of Hope Lutheran Church. Tim has written and appeared in several DVD-based Bible studies produced by LHM's Men's Network. On weekends, Tim and his family enjoy spending time in the mountains of New Mexico. Tim also runs marathons, rides bicycles, and rides around town on his new Harley Davidson.

Matt Victor



Matt has been married to his wife, Carol, for 25 years, and they are blessed with three wonderful kids. Matt was born and raised in the Jewish tradition and was brought to faith in Christ in 1989, at age 30. Matt has worked in the information technology industry for the past twenty-five years having a variety of responsibilities. Matt says, "As with most folks, we have had our ups and downs over the years, but the Lord has always carried us through."

John Crowe



John and his wife, Sandra, are the parents of five children. He serves as parish administrator at St. John Lutheran Church and School in Wheaton, Illinois. In his spare time John teaches and plays tennis, and enjoys singing in his church's choir and in small ensembles. Holding degrees from Valparaiso University and the University of Phoenix, John is working on lay ministry certification through Concordia University, Mequon, Wisconsin.

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Steve Sandfort

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Gary Dunker

Gary and his wife, Carol, live in Lincoln, Nebraska, where they worship at Messiah Lutheran Church. Gary works in sales for KLCV Radio, a member of the Christian Bott Radio Network. Gary enjoys attending Nebraska football and baseball games, writing adult Bible studies and dramas, as well as spending time with his four grandchildren Evan, Easton, Brynley, and Dathin.



How to Use This Book

This isn't your father's devotional.

Then again, while your father may not have read the stories found in *Blessed Is the Man*, he may have heard stories similar to them. Stories told by his father or brother or friend, real stories from real men who experienced real life relying on God's real—and amazing—grace. Stories like the ones you've heard other believers tell you, or stories you've told yourself.

Blessed Is the Man provides you and your Bible study group with six weeks of faith narratives written by men who have prayerfully considered biblical psalms. At the beginning of each week, you will read an assigned psalm. Five days during that week you'll read a verse or two of that psalm, followed by the author's story. Next, you may pray a suggested prayer or choose another as you see fit. Finally, you'll answer a few brief Bible study questions, which will help you consider other ways the psalm may apply to you. To get the most out of *Blessed Is the Man*, prayerfully review the psalm from time to time throughout the week. Through God's Word, the Holy Spirit will confront and challenge, but He will also comfort and console. At the end of each week, join your brothers in Christ in a group Bible study. Weekly small-group questions are reproducible. So, if you want to hold your group Bible study before hammering the first nail at a Habitat for Humanity project, at halftime during a televised game, or before you throw the brats on the grill, do so! You may make as many copies of these pages as you need for the guys in your group.

We are grateful that you are taking a man's journey through the Psalms in *Blessed Is the Man*. Along the way, you may be reminded of stories of faith told by your grandfather, father, brother, or friend. The adventure into God's Word may even inspire you to tell a few on your own.

—The Editor

Suggestions for Small-Group Participants

1. Before you begin, spend some time in prayer, asking God to strengthen your faith through a study of His Word. The Scriptures were written so that we might believe in Jesus Christ and have life in His name (John 20:31).

2. Take some time before the meeting to look over the session, review the psalm, and answer the questions.

3. As a courtesy to others, arrive on time.

4. Be an active participant. The leader will guide the group's discussion, not give a lecture.

5. Avoid dominating the conversation by answering every question or by giving unnecessarily long answers. On the other hand, avoid the temptation to not share at all.

6. Treat anything shared in your group as confidential until you have asked for and received permission to share it outside of the group. Treat information about others outside of your group as confidential until you have asked for and received permission to share it with group members.

7. Some participants may be new to Bible study or new to the Christian faith. Help them feel welcome and comfortable.

8. Affirm other participants when you can. If someone offers what you perceive to be a "wrong" answer, ask the Holy Spirit to guide him to seek the correct answer from God's Word.

9. Keep in mind that the questions are discussion starters. Don't be afraid to ask additional questions that relate to the topic. Don't get the group off track.

10. If you are comfortable doing so, volunteer now and then to pray at the beginning or end of the session.

Guide to Men's Ministry

There's a mother watching her boys play in the backyard. The boys are wrestling around in the mud, fighting to see who will be at the top of the pecking order, as brothers often do. There's another mother in the same backyard who has a little girl, or you might even say a *princess*. She comments, "Don't you think those boys are going to hurt one another? How are you going to get the stains out of their clothes?" To this, the mother of the boys replies, "Boys will be boys." In this short story, it is clear that one mother understands boys and the other has no clue how boys become men.

The sad news is this: the Church in many ways has adopted the voice of the princess's mother who never raised boys. It seems men are expected to live, act, and behave in ways that makes sure any remnant of their childhood has been extinguished. Men are tamed to fit the mold of what a good little boy should look like—free of danger, free of risk, and free of anything fun.

Giving men permission to be men once again is absolutely critical to the Church and to a successful men's ministry. There is enough boy left in every man that beckons to compete, have fun, risk, and live out the adventurous spirit only God can give. Yes, it is possible for all of this to happen in the Church while men still live within the will and call of God upon their lives.

7 Tips for Men's Ministry

GET "REAL" LEADERS

Men desperately need leaders who are authentic, genuine, and nonjudgmental. You must choose a leader whom other men would want to hang out with and can relate to on multiple levels. This is a guy who other guys love to hang out with because he seems so down to earth, has fun living life, and would be a leader in any environment he found himself in.

THERA-PUKE-IC

Guys need to be in an environment that is natural, not clinical. Guys will share their struggles, challenges, and victories as long as it's not the purpose of the meeting or even the hidden agenda for their time together. When they catch wind that this is about to turn into group therapy, most guys will immediately button their lips, turn off their brain, and look for the nearest exit. When the environment is right, guys will talk. Don't force it. Please, don't force it.

LESS IS MORE

Women are always amazed at how simple men can be at times. Most men like simplicity and are drawn to it. Whether you're planning a men's social, Bible study, retreat, or small group, it is always better to err on the side of keeping it simple. Simple doesn't mean plain or boring; it means doing a few things really, really well. When you sit down to plan activities, try structuring them around broader themes such as having fun, learning a little, and providing a good challenge or risk for men to participate in.

TALKING IS OPTIONAL

Generally when men come together for activities, Bible studies, small groups, and/or retreats, there is going to be a time for prayer, reading, and answering some questions. There are many men who don't like to read out loud, pray out loud, or be put on the spot to answer questions out loud. Be sure to check with guys ahead of time about praying or reading. There will always be a few men who are comfortable answering questions, and these men usually pave the way for more timid guys to speak up.

KEEP THE SPIRIT OF COMPETITION ALIVE

Not all men played sports, but most men have competed as boys in some area or another. Men, by and large, enjoy competition and friendly wagers. Some men like playing golf against one another, while others enjoy seeing who smokes the best brisket. Either way you slice it, men always enjoy themselves when they can compete in a nonthreatening way, in a way that will never leave them feeling foolish in front of each other.

MEETINGS SHOULD NEVER BE MEETINGS

From time to time, there will be a need to plan various activities for men. The worst thing you can do is form a committee or a board. There will always be natural

leaders who will need to do some planning for men's ministry, but have the meeting at a place men enjoy, like an athletic event, a pub, or even on a golf course while playing a round. No one, especially men, needs to add more "official" meetings to his schedule. Make it informal and fun while you orchestrate real business.

A MINISTRY NEEDS MORE THAN ONE DOOR

How accessible is your ministry? The fastest growing churches always have multiple entry points for folks to get involved and be connected to their church. Men's ministry is no different. While there is a tremendous brotherhood among men, there are also a wide range of things that men like and don't like. Some men like camping and the great outdoors. Other men would prefer manual labor around the church. Some might even like more intellectually oriented activities. No matter what, you need to ensure that your men's ministry has many different attractions that respect different interests, gifts, abilities, and skills. There are venues for all men to come together, and there are activities that will only attract certain men. Keep all these nuances in mind.

SAMPLE

3 Steps to Launch a Men's Ministry in *Your Church*

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Pick a place that will work for launching your first men's ministry event. A tailgate setting would be an absolutely prime site. Other options are at a lake, the rustic outdoors, or even a barn of sorts. Whatever you choose as your site, it should be a place where guys can get excited and loud and not feel closed in.

MEN EAT MEAT AND LOTS OF IT

Once you've got the location nailed down, it's time to think about the meat you are going to serve. Depending on what area of the country you live in, your choices and preferences will vary. Some examples are having a wild-game type spread of food. This usually takes place in areas where men enjoy hunting. If you have chosen a tailgate at some sporting event, cook up a bunch of bratwurst, brisket, and/or ribs. Warning: it's tough to cook a great steak when you're doing it in large numbers. Men are picky with their steaks, so be careful if this is your choice. Don't forget to bring beverages that your men would enjoy as well. (Okay, you can throw on some veggie burgers too.)

IT'S TIME TO LAUNCH—THE DAY IS HERE

Okay, you've chosen a great site. You've got the volunteers you need to cook the meat at the site. Now it's time to plan how you are going to effectively brainstorm what your men's ministry might look like. This is not a time to be critical of ideas. This is a time to really listen to what men are saying.

What kinds of activities do they want to be involved with?

What kinds of adventures are they looking for?

What contribution do they want their men's ministry to make to the kingdom of God externally and their church internally?

Make this fun. For example, to get things started you could have some balloons attached to a big piece of plywood and have various ideas written on paper inside of the balloons. Have one of the men use the BB gun you provided to shoot one of the balloons and see what idea is inside and talk about it. This exercise can be a lot of fun, but please be safe with it. Once you have some good ideas about the direction the men would like to go, pick another location to flush out more of the details and planning. Ask for any volunteers who want to help with this next phase. Once this next phase is finished, you should be able to get to work—but don't forget to keep on listening to the men in your church.

S A M P L E

Introduction

“Read the Psalms.”

Over the years, I have exhorted countless friends and acquaintances with those three words. I continue to give the same advice to people who find themselves in a tight place or facing some hard dilemma or sorrow. I suppose that one could hear the words as little more than a trite spiritual cliché pressed into service when there is nothing else insightful or helpful to say—along the same lines as “I’ll pray for you.” After all, directing a man in the midst of a crisis or difficult situation to read (anything!) demonstrates precious little imagination, compassion, or grasp of reality. Nevertheless, I did it and I still do it, not because I can think of nothing better to say or suggest or because I am overly optimistic about the capacity of men to choose to read but because actually reading the Psalms is such a meaningful and fruitful thing to do, especially during tough times. I give the counsel not with a twinge of guilt or regret for not having shown more compassion but with a note of hope and anticipation—as if I have just divulged a secret with the power to transform a man’s life. And that, of course, is precisely the truth of the matter.

The collected Psalms of Israel constituted a large part of the worship life of God’s Old Testament people. We have here the songs sung by worshipers in the temple and synagogue, songs sung by travelers wending their way up to Jerusalem to celebrate another festival, songs sung by ordinary people in their daily routines—an earworm stuck in their brain, rehearsing all day long the wonder of God’s grace, the majesty of His creation, and the wisdom of His Law. The Psalms are starkly and rudely honest. When David is tired or worried or frustrated or worn out by life, God knows it . . . and so do we. That’s the particular wonder of the Psalms and the power they have for us who read them today.

The Psalms teach us that there really is nothing new under the sun and that what we think must be a one-in-a-million struggle or heartache is actually the common plight of men in every time—and we marvel to discover that someone has already worked that moment of hard reality into a poignant, sometimes eloquent, and always truthful cry of faith. When you read the Psalms, that cry of faith becomes your cry of faith. Such is the latent power of the Psalms. They are the words of the Holy Spirit, inspired indeed, but they are also the words of real men, human and frail. The Psalms allow us to pray and praise along with these saints and to complain

and question along with these sinners. They are both, of course, and so are we.

The Psalms, like life, are not all alike. Some are exuberant outbursts of praise, others are sad laments, still others focus on God's messianic promise, and yet another group takes up the realities of life in this world from the perspective of the Creator of this world. This book will center its attention on that final category, psalms that have been labeled wisdom psalms. It is a fitting name. In these psalms, we are led to consider God's plans for His people—specifically for His men. Yes, there is practical advice, but more than that, there is a perspective that can shape the way that all of life is seen.

So, you are poised to become a reader of the Psalms, not only a reader though, but also a studier, a slow digester of the Psalms. An entire six weeks devoted to six wisdom psalms is a leisurely pace, no doubt. But that's the beauty of the study. No need to hurry, no quotas to reach, no minimum of chapters to consume. Each day you consider a mere handful of verses, usually only one or two, and learn the truth of that word of God. You contemplate and consider its applications to your own life. And these psalms do their work. Please understand, the study that follows does not offer itself as a work of precise and careful exegesis or biblical interpretation. There is no pretence in these pages. This is a devotional work, an exercise in meditation and reflection on words of a text as they do real work in the present.

The very premise of the Psalms, then, finds its accurate echo in the format of this study. The psalm designated for each week is broken into five parts, one each for the workdays of the week. Each section is the basis of a devotional reflection written by ordinary men—men like you. These are men who live regular lives with regular jobs and regular struggles. And it is out of this regular ordinariness of mundane daily life that they write their meditations about the meaning of the verses. These are the thoughts and the insights of men like you, men like David, who simply lived their lives and in the living encountered God's reality. The strength of the Psalms is their ability to appeal to every man. That is also the strength of the devotional pieces that make up this volume. As you read along, you will join a contemporary brother in the faith and live life with him for a time. You will ride on horseback with a trail boss, cringe over the guilt of stolen money, marvel at the crazy grace of a mulligan, scour a black Nebraska backyard for night crawlers, get smitten from above by a plummeting Christmas star, and face the thrill and terror of piloting a plane. As you travel for a while with each author, you will learn with him valuable lessons about God and life—an experience not unlike reading the Psalms.

Reading the Psalms and benefitting from the experiences and thoughts of others who read can give you insight into life and its often hard realities. Better than

that, reading the Psalms can help to reorient your life and its priorities. The Psalms have a way of calling us back to what matters. They compel us to take seriously God's call on our lives. And so it is that the real goal is not reading the Psalms but being read by the Psalms. The difference is profound. Those who merely read are looking for nuggets of wisdom, an insight into a thorny dilemma, a bit of comfort for a sad situation. Those who only read are trying to get something they can take on their own terms, something that can be fit into their life and its comfortable routine. By contrast, those who go to the Psalms to be read by the Psalms recognize the claim of the Psalms—these texts are the vehicle of the Holy Spirit. They are God's. They are normative. They are the standard. They are the reality into which we must fit our lives, not vice versa. The Psalms—especially the wisdom psalms—spell out what God expects. They give us the pattern. They call us to impossible heights and demand absurd sacrifices. They take our comfortable lives and rattle them—no, batter them into a broken shambles—challenging our even-keel, unruffled existence and forcing us to see things with new eyes: God's eyes. Such is the disconcerting experience of being read by the Psalms. When the text reads the man, the man cannot stay the same. He must change or die resisting.

Martin Luther insisted—and taught all of us—that the center of Scripture is Christ. This is, as he also knew, intensely true of the Psalms—even the wisdom psalms. But it is not as if one must look beneath every verse of each psalm to find Christ somehow hidden in an obscure analogy or in some sort of gospel-trickery that manufactures Christological implications where none are present. No, our Lord is present in the text as He Himself speaks the text to us. Our Lord is present and the center as He alone is able to embody the descriptions of the righteous and blessed man who lives always and fully within the will of the Father. Our Lord is most certainly and mercifully present as He comes to us who have endured being read by the text—who have been undone in our self-deluded satisfaction and equanimity—and delivers to us the delicious grace of undeserved and unfathomable forgiveness. This is the way that Christ is present for us, and this is the way that Christ is truly the living and life-giving center of every wisdom psalm.

Blessed Is the Man is an apt title. For we who read the Psalms—and far more important, we who are read by the Psalms—are truly blessed when the Psalms reduce us to nothingness, only to assure us again of God's gracious favor made certain in the life, death, and resurrection of the One who alone is the blessed Man. We are His people, and as His people we share what is His—even His blessedness. The blessed man is a breathtaking standard. That is true. But the blessed man is also the promise of God. It is what He works in His people through the power of the Spirit. It is what He works in you who read and are read by the Psalms. So, press forward with an-

ticipation. You are about to become a reader of the Psalms. Better yet, you are about to become one who is read by the Psalms. And so it will be true and be said of you: blessed is the man.

S A M P L E

Week One

Psalm 112

¹ Praise the LORD!

Blessed is the man who fears the LORD,
who greatly delights in His commandments!

² His offspring will be mighty in the land;
the generation of the upright will be blessed.

³ Wealth and riches are in his house,
and his righteousness endures forever.

⁴ Light dawns in the darkness for the upright;
he is gracious, merciful, and righteous.

⁵ It is well with the man who deals generously and lends;
who conducts his affairs with justice.

⁶ For the righteous will never be moved;
he will be remembered forever.

⁷ He is not afraid of bad news;
his heart is firm, trusting in the LORD.

⁸ His heart is steady; he will not be afraid,
until he looks in triumph on his adversaries.

⁹ He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever;
his horn is exalted in honor.

¹⁰ The wicked man sees it and is angry;
he gnashes his teeth and melts away;
the desire of the wicked will perish!

Psalm 112:1-2

Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD,
who greatly delights in His commandments! His offspring will
be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be
blessed.

A Different Kind of Fear

On September 11, 2001, there was more than enough fear to go around. Only one block from the World Trade Center that day, I was afraid like never before in my life. I watched in horror as people jumped nearly a hundred stories to their deaths, flames lapping at their backs as they fell. I prayed, "Lord, I pray that they know You and Your saving grace." As the day's events unfolded before my eyes, I called on the Lord through prayer numerous times. September 11 impacted my family well into the future, but God would lead us through the emotional and financial challenges that lay ahead with His grace.

When you hear the word *fear*, what do you think of? Are you afraid of being alone in the dark? Do snakes make the hair stand up on the back of your neck? There is another kind of fear that is used many times in the Bible. Psalm 112:1 tells us "Blessed is the man who fears the LORD." This kind of fear is different than the fear we normally experience. It's not the kind of fear that I and many others experienced on 9/11. The fear that I am talking about is a God-given, deep respect for Him and His undeserved love toward us. Instead of running away from this fear, we should embrace it.

You and I live in a sin-soaked world. We sometimes struggle to stay afloat. Our minds can become cluttered with all of the things we need to do. Whether it is that special work project that always gets delayed or that unbudgeted bill that arrived this month, challenges confront us. And how do we react? Usually we try to maintain our self-image. We say to ourselves, "I can handle this. Let me put in a few more hours at work," or "I really had my heart set on that iPod. That bill is just going to have to wait."

Now don't get me wrong; sometimes we do have to take the proverbial "bull by the horns." But we also need to remember Who really is in charge. Too often, when things start whirling out of control, we focus on ourselves and lose sight of who can help us. We turn our focus away from Jesus and start putting our faith in ourselves. When we do, we put ourselves before Christ and before family. Yet the godly man "greatly delights in His commandments" (Psalm 112:1). He knows God's commandments point out his sin, especially the sin of pride. But he also knows that those commandments were fulfilled by His Savior.

God gave us His commandments to help us see how desperately we need Him. God's Law reflects back to us the hideous truth of our sinful nature and our inability to follow the commandments perfectly. And yet, perfection is what God requires of us in order to live in a right relationship with Him. Because of sin, in this life we cannot be perfect. So, God sent His one and only Son to live a perfect, sinless life for us. And to take away our guilt due to our sins, Jesus died on the cross with all of our sins. Defeating death in the process, now His resurrection declares His victory! Jesus Christ covered our sins with His blood. Now, because of Him, God the Father sees us as His perfect children.

The commandments also guide us in our day-to-day living. We live as Christians in response to God's wonderful gift of grace in His Son. God gives us His Word and His Spirit to help and comfort us through the trials we face each day. As God's Word and Spirit guide us, we become witnesses to those around us. If a picture is worth a thousand words, imagine the impact of your witness as God works through you. Think about how God used godly men in the Bible; think about how God calls men to be the spiritual leader of their families today. He calls us husbands and fathers, employees and citizens, sons and brothers and friends, to do the same. Now that's a heavy load, but the Holy Spirit enables us to fulfill those roles. In so doing, we witness to our loved ones and teach them the importance of including Christ in all that we do.

Writing to Timothy, Paul said,

Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. But as for you, O man of

God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." (1 Timothy 6:6–12)

Paul's words are more than good advice. They impart true spiritual wisdom. That wisdom has its source and its power in "the eternal life to which you were called" (v. 12). Although you have heard it many times, and may have even memorized it as a child, concentrate on what Jesus says to you: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Your eternal life is secure in Christ. Through faith in Him, you have become wise. You are in awe of your heavenly Father. So no matter what you are facing, you don't have to be afraid. God, your Savior, is on your side.

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Your eternal life is secure in Christ. Through faith in Him, you have become wise. You are in awe of your heavenly Father.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank You for giving me the gift of faith in Your Son. Help me to keep my eyes focused on Jesus, no matter what events surround me. By Your Holy Spirit, grant me the strength I need for each day. I ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

.....

Monday

DAILY STUDY QUESTIONS

Psalm 112:1-2

1. The psalm begins with a familiar phrase, or in some translations, a single word: "Praise the LORD," or "Hallelujah!" Is this the exclamation of a believer, or an exhortation to the reader?
2. If the Law always accuses (and it does), how is it possible that one can ever "delight in God's commandments"?
3. What promise does verse 2 offer the faithful father? What part does your "fear of the Lord" play in the fulfillment of this promise?
4. Describe a man who is upright. How does one attain this lofty designation?

Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever. Light dawns in the darkness for the upright; he is gracious, merciful, and righteous.

True Wealth and Riches

We should have been on top of the world. We had just celebrated our son's first birthday. Our daughters, ten and eight, were thriving as we became comfortable in our new surroundings. Let me go back. Two years earlier, my job uprooted us from family and friends in suburban Fairfield County, Connecticut, to the rural farming communities of Southern Illinois. As we prepared for the transition, my daughter, who was six years old at the time, inquired if "people out there spoke English." Transitioning from New England to the Midwest was a real culture shock, but we had turned that corner. Since we moved, the Lord had led us to a wonderful church and school that provided us with a new family and support system.

And yet on that weeknight, my wife and I were sitting in our family room with our pastor. All of a sudden our world was turning upside down. My wife was having a mental and emotional meltdown. What was happening? Why was this happening? How did we get here?

Lord, is this the wealth and riches you promise?

Have you ever wondered what happened to your wealth and riches? If you listen to some televangelists, they will tell you to ask God for that Mercedes-Benz or that million dollar home and it will be yours . . . if you have enough faith. Of course, that flies in the face of what God's Word tells us. God never promises that kind of riches. What we do know from God's Word is that all we have comes from God and that He blesses us in different ways. Paul tells us that we "[have] gifts that differ according to the grace given to us" (Romans 12:6). He also writes, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:3). Some of the gifts God gives us are physical, while other gifts are spiritual. In His wisdom, God gives us the things we need to accomplish His purposes, not ours. Paul again writes, "Now there are variet-

ies of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone" (1 Corinthians 12:4–6). When we lose the perspective that all we have comes from God for His purposes, we allow our sinful nature to take over and we begin to focus on ourselves, how we can acquire or keep more possessions, and how much we deserve the things God gives us.

A few weeks ago, while I was walking through a store, a man approached me. He caught me off guard and asked me if I could spare a few dollars so he could get something to eat. My mind was focused on the things that I needed and, without thinking, I said, "Sorry, I can't help you," and he walked away. As I continued down the aisle, I thought to myself, *I ought to go complain to the store manager that they let this guy wander through the store asking people for money, . . .* and then I felt as if the Holy Spirit were knocking on the door to my heart: "Can we talk? Do you remember not so long ago when you and your family did not know where the next meal was coming from?"

My mind quickly went back to that eleven-month period. No job, bill collectors calling—whom do I pay? Do we have enough for groceries? What about the holidays coming up—Thanksgiving, Christmas? It was a difficult time for our family. I felt as if the Holy Spirit were saying, "Remember that?" It was pretty powerful. All I could think of now was *I wonder when this guy last had a meal? I know my belly is full, and I have more than I need, but I still complain at times that I need this or that.* For the next few minutes, I went up and down the aisles looking for this guy to try and give him a few bucks. I lost the opportunity to do with God's gifts what He intends us to do with them: share them.

We all have these life-changing experiences. Sometimes it takes years to gain the perspective necessary for us to see how the Lord blessed us during challenging times. In spite of our short-sightedness, God showers us with His riches, grace, and wisdom. "Light dawns in the darkness for the upright; he is gracious, merciful, and righteous" (Psalm 112:4). God's light—the truth of His love and grace in Christ—rescues us out of those dark times. God also illumines people around us to share that light in word and deed. We are called by God to bring that light to others by sharing the gifts, both physical and spiritual, that He gives us. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:14–16 that we are "the light of the world" and that we should "let [our] light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Thanks be to God for His G-R-A-C-E: Gods Riches At Christ's Expense. As Paul reminds us, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was

rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). There is no greater wealth or riches than the promise of salvation we receive through the blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The riches that He shares with us are immeasurable: His righteousness, grace, and mercy. No one can take this wealth and riches from us. They are ours by grace through faith.

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There is no greater wealth or riches than the promise of salvation we receive through the blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for all of Your wonderful gifts. Thank You mostly for the riches and wealth of my salvation through Christ, my Lord. Help me to use what You have given me for Your glory and the benefit of others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

S A M P L E

Tuesday

DAILY STUDY QUESTIONS

Psalm 112:3-4

1. What wealth and riches fill your home today?
2. How does it feel when the promised wealth of verse 3 doesn't seem to apply to your case? How can life's circumstances both rattle and grow one's faith?
3. How long must one wait for the arrival of light?
4. In what sense is it true that *your* righteousness does endure forever?

S A M P L E

It is well with the man who deals generously and lends; who conducts his affairs with justice. For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered forever.

Be Right to Do Right

Have you ever been to the store and received change for a \$20 bill when you gave the cashier a \$10 bill? How about this: Have you ever had a basket full of items, and you had a pretty good idea of what the final bill should be, and you were charged \$30 or \$40 less than what you expected? Then, when you get to your car and review the receipt you realize those jeans you purchased didn't get rung up. Ever find money on the ground? What about a wallet with money inside? I'll bet you've encountered one of those situations before. Now the million-dollar question: what did you do next?

When I was seventeen years old, I thought I was pretty special. Jesus was knocking, but I wasn't listening. It would take another fourteen years before the Holy Spirit worked through God's Word to change my heart. (This is no justification for my actions in the story I am about to tell, but I do hope I would have reacted differently had I been a believer at the time.) I was running with one of my buddies, and for some reason we needed to get in touch with someone by phone. In those days, cell phones were nonexistent. The only thing close to the concept of a cell phone was Captain Kirk's communicator on Star Trek. My buddy and I were on the road so we stopped at the corner store to use the phone booth (remember those?). As we approached it, we noticed a wallet sitting on the shelf in the phone booth. Quickly we made the call and got back in the car. Seeing that no one was around, we thought, *finders keepers, losers weepers*. We opened the wallet and found a hundred-dollar bill. JACKPOT! We split that money and spent it on ourselves.

Just to set the record straight, this was a difficult story to share. It was not one of my shining moments in life, and I am not even sure if I ever told this story to my wife of twenty-five years. She knows now. A couple of years later, on a visit home from college, I went out with some friends. As we headed back to the car at the end of the evening, we were engaging in some testosterone-induced horseplay. I did not

realize it then, but during our wrestling match I lost my wallet. When I woke up the next morning, I could not find it. There was not a lot of money, maybe thirty dollars or so, but all of my identification, driver's license, social security card, and college ID were in it. I remembered the wallet I found a few years back and thought I would never see that wallet or anything that was in it again. What a hassle this was going to be to get it replaced. Ironically, three days later I received a package in the mail. It was my wallet with everything intact minus some amount under a dollar that was used to purchase the postage to ship the wallet to me.

As one of its definitions, a dictionary may define *righteous* as "being free from sin or guilt." *Justice* can be defined as "a principle or idea about right conduct." In other words: do the right thing. That surely doesn't fit me. Does it fit you?

Remember the story about the woman who was about to be stoned for adultery? Jesus calmly responded to her accusers, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). We hear our pastor tells us at the beginning of worship, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). How can we "conduct our affairs with justice," as the psalm tells us? If we are not careful, we may fool ourselves into thinking that we have the ability to be generous and just on our own, that we need to do things in order to become righteous before God. The more appropriate question to ask ourselves is not "How can we conduct our affairs with justice?" but only "Can we, apart from God, 'conduct our affairs with justice'?"

In his Letter to the Romans, Paul writes, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out" (Romans 7:18). So while we may have the desire to do good, to be just, it takes more than desire to fulfill God's Law. It takes full compliance. That is what God requires for us to be righteous before Him. So where does that leave us? Broken and lost? No! Praise be to God that Jesus Christ, His Son, obeyed every jot and tittle of the Law for us, then shed His blood on Calvary to pay for all the times that we didn't obey the Law. Paul wrote to the Romans, "So by [Jesus'] obedience the many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19). And to the Corinthians, he said, "In Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Corinthians 5:19). It is only through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection that we are righteous in God's sight and conduct our affairs with justice.

As a matter of fact, today's psalm verses make more sense if we look at them in reverse. We can "deal generously" and "conduct our affairs with justice" because of the righteousness we have been given through faith in Christ. In other words, before

we can "do right," we have to have to "be right" with God. He sets us "free from sin and guilt" through faith in Christ and enables us through faith to "do the right thing." I pray that the person who returned my wallet (minus the dollar) had been enabled to deal generously with me through faith in Christ.

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We can "deal generously" and "conduct our affairs with justice" because of the righteousness we have been given through faith in Christ.

Prayer: Dear Lord, You desire that all be saved and come to knowledge of Your truth. Help me to do the right thing, not to draw attention to myself, but so that I may be a witness of Your unending love. I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

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S A M P L E

Wednesday

DAILY STUDY QUESTIONS

Psalm 112:5-6

1. Think of a time when you were not treated justly; how did you react?
2. If justice is rightly defined as giving to each man that which is his legitimate due, what role does justice play in your close relationships?
3. What would complete justice require of you? Think about the past twenty-four hours. Has everything you have done lived up to the standard of full justice?
4. Are there any old acts of injustice that continue to haunt you? How can old sins continue to inflict present pain?
5. Why not confess that old injustice right now? Your Lord is eager to forgive.

He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the LORD. His heart is steady; he will not be afraid, until he looks in triumph on his adversaries.

Good New News

“No news is good news.”

After twenty-five years working in the computer field, I’ve grown accustomed to calls coming in at all hours of the night. No matter how many times it happens, though, my heart still races as I awake out of a deep sleep. Once my initial confusion passes and I stop pushing the snooze button on my alarm clock, I realize that the ringing thing is the phone. That’s when fear takes hold of me. Who is calling me at this hour? Are all of my kids at home and in bed? Is it Mom or Dad calling to let me know that one or the other has been called home to heaven? Normally, however, it’s the office calling to inform me about a computer problem that needs my immediate attention to ensure that the computer systems are operational for the start of business the next day.

What is the worst news that you could get? A pink slip? A diagnosis of a terminal illness for you or a loved one? What about the news of a loved one’s or close friend’s untimely death? Maybe you have already experienced that type of bad news. No matter how prepared you think you are for such occasions, it is never easy to receive such news. Before such occasions arise, it is helpful to heed Paul’s charge: “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11). The devil loves to work through bad news. Using the difficult situations we face, Satan tries to pull us away from God and His love. The world asks, “How can a loving God allow bad things to happen?” As Christians we know that this question can be answered in one word: sin. Bad things don’t happen because God is capricious or cruel; we human beings brought sin—and sin’s consequences—into the world. The devil was complicit in that act and now tries to stop us from receiving or leads us to turn us away from the reconciliation that Christ won for us.

Apart from our Lord's unjust suffering and death, the story of Job is perhaps the strongest account of bad things happening to good people. Job "was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil" (Job 1:1). Job trusted in God's promises of mercy, and he had profound respect for the Lord. He also sought to follow the Lord's ways. However, Job, who was blessed with wealth and a large family, lost it all. How did he react? "In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong" (Job 1:22). Although Job remained faithful, he felt that God owed him an explanation for the trials that he went through. Job prayed to God and asked, "Why?" Finally, God spoke to Job and asked him, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" (Job 38:4). It was then that Job realized that God is God, and that God did not owe him any explanation. Job confessed and repented, "I had heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6). In the end, God blessed Job. "And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before" (Job 42:10).

When bad news arrives, it doesn't come empty-handed. It comes carrying baggage—baggage like pain, suffering, and loss. Sometimes the baggage is physical, sometimes it is emotional, and many times it is both. I know that suffering is not high on my list of things I want out of life, but God has a different plan for you and me. He tells us, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). Trusting in the Lord, our hearts are firm in Him. It is through Him that we can endure the hurt that bad news brings. And God also strengthens us as Christians through those trials and sufferings. The apostle Paul tells us, "More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Romans 5:3-5).

Men, always remember that Christ triumphed over all of our adversaries—sin, Satan, hell, and death—when He died on the cross. The writer to the Hebrews puts it this way, "[Jesus] Himself likewise partook of [flesh and blood], that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery" (2:14-15).

Jesus was also raised in resurrection victory! Should we look forward to bad news? My vote is no, but I do know that we can trust in God and His promises. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4). "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:56-57).

Brothers, bad news is a part of this fallen world we live in. But even in the midst of bad news, there is other news, and this news is good! God really does love everyone in the world, and He proved His love by sending His Son to die for our sins on the cross. All who believe in Him have eternal life. That's the kind of news that will keep you, your family, and friends firm and secure, whatever you or they may face. It's the Good News that's always new!

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Brothers, bad news is a part of this fallen world we live in. But even in the midst of bad news, there is other news, and this news is good!

Prayer: Dear God, strengthen my faith so that when I receive bad news, my heart is firm in the promises of Your Word and my confidence is fixed on the Good News of Your Son, Jesus Christ. In His name I pray. Amen.

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S A M P L E

Thursday

DAILY STUDY QUESTIONS

Psalm 112:7-8

1. Think of a time that you experienced unexpected bad news. How did you feel? How did you respond?
2. Is a strong reaction to bad news a sign of a heart that does not trust in the Lord? If someone breaks down, does it mean that he or she has a deficient or immature faith?
3. In what ways might it be true that a stolid, stoical response to bad news is a poor witness to one's faith in God?
4. What's the difference between actually getting bad news and living in fear of receiving bad news?
5. What would it mean for you to look in triumph on your adversaries?

He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever; his horn is exalted in honor. The wicked man sees it and is angry; he gnashes his teeth and melts away; the desire of the wicked will perish!

Forever and Ever

Our psalm this week has focused on the comfort Christians have as they seek to serve God and their fellow man. Christians aren't impervious to being hurt; the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh wage war against us. In spite of these woes, the man righteous by faith in Christ "has distributed freely; he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." His righteousness endures forever because the good deeds he has accomplished have been done in repentant faith.

Have you ever thought about how long is forever? Forever is a pretty long time. Remember when you were a kid and you couldn't wait for Christmas to arrive? It seemed like that day would take forever to get here—and you were thinking that on the day after Thanksgiving! As we get older (and wiser, we hope), *forever* takes on a whole new meaning. Now we need forever to meet all of our work and family commitments. How can we ever get it all done?

Forever really is a foreign concept to us sinful human beings. When God spoke the universe into being, He also created time. "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day" (Genesis 1:3–5). Because you and I are created in and are bound by time, forever is impossible to imagine. God understands time because He created it; He also understands the concept of forever, because He stands outside time. Indeed, there are many mysteries when it comes to the things of God.

In the Book of Isaiah, God tells us "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9). From the beginning of time, man has had trouble accepting that fact—starting

with Adam and Eve, to the tower of Babel, to Moses, to David, to Peter, to you and to me. As Christians, we wrestle with the old Adam, our inborn, sinful nature. That nature wars against us to keep us from knowing and understanding the things of God. You would think that God would have run out of patience with us a long time ago. But as God's Word tells us, "As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12). God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ is so complete, it is radical.

That is another awesome thing we may have trouble wrapping our natural minds around. Have you ever really considered how far the east is from the west? Why would God use east and west? Think of a number line that goes off in two opposite directions. If you start a journey in one direction (say, east) and continue on that plane, you will never reach the other direction (west). You can even travel forever, and you'll never reach your destination. That's how far Jesus Christ took our sins away from us when he died on the cross. Wow! How can we be worthy of that? The answer is we can't be worthy. There is nothing we can do to gain that righteousness. That is why Christ had to take all of our sins to the cross and why we call the Gospel the Good News. The Book of Isaiah tells us "all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment" (Isaiah 64:6). The righteousness that we have comes only from our faith in Christ, which is God's gift to us by the Holy Spirit through God's Word.

Now, we do respond to God's Word and the Gospel message with the assistance and guidance of the Holy Spirit. God instructs us through His Word, "You shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be" (Deuteronomy 15:7-8). Jesus spoke often of servanthood and, along with that servanthood, humility. Jesus said, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matthew 23:12). Throughout the Bible, we read about great men and women of the faith who endured all sorts of trials and tribulations while being strengthened by the Lord and His grace. The writer to the Hebrews extols these saints:

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city. (Hebrews 11:13-16)

Jesus reminds us, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19–21).

The world chases its dreams here in time on earth, searching for fulfillment, fame, and fortune. The world will only be disappointed. We Christians, however, respond to God's free gift of salvation in Christ by the deeds we do for eternity. Acceptable to God for Christ's sake because they are done in repentant faith, our good deeds will last forever. *Forever* and *forgiven* are strange words to the natural man. But to the man blessed by God, the key to understanding them is faith.

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We Christians, however, respond to God's free gift of salvation in Christ by the deeds we do for eternity.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank You for sending Your Holy Spirit, who helps me to understand Your Word. Help me to apply what He teaches me so that I may lay up true treasures in heaven. I ask in Your name. Amen.

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Friday

DAILY STUDY QUESTIONS

Psalm 112:9–10

1. How righteous do you feel today?
2. What does giving freely to the poor have to do with one's righteousness?
3. How is it possible that *your* righteousness will endure forever?
4. While God's Righteous One will be exalted and blessed eternally, the wicked will not fare so well. How do you react to the graphic description of the wicked?
5. What do you think is the purpose of verse 10?

Week One

PSALM 112

The 112th psalm is a psalm of comfort in which the pious, who fear God, are praised for their good life and are promised eternal comfort against all trouble. They are especially commended to a sincere confidence and trust in God's grace, so that they may be undismayed and undaunted (which is the real, true faith) until they see the destruction of the godless and their foes.

- Martin Luther

Week One, Psalm 112

GROUP BIBLE STUDY

(Questions and answers on pp. 164–66.)

1. What do you think of when you hear the word *righteous*? What does it mean to be righteous?
2. Describe the most righteous man you have ever known. What was his most compelling quality or characteristic?
3. Is there a difference between being blessed and being righteous? Using the descriptions in the psalm, describe the characteristics of a man who is blessed and righteous.
4. Verse 1 declares that the first two criteria of blessedness are fear of the Lord and delight in His commandments. What does it mean to “fear the Lord”? How do these ideas fit with a Christian perspective?
5. The psalm counts children as one of the marks of God’s blessing. What is the correlation between a man’s righteousness (the righteousness he achieves by his faithful living) and the success of his heirs? What is the definition or mark of a successful child?

6. Consider verse 4. In what tangible ways does God bring His light into the darkness?

7. The old saying “neither a borrower nor a lender be” seems to contradict the exhortation of verse 5. What is the value in being willing to lend? Why are we often reluctant to follow the psalmist’s urging?

8. Jesus concurred with the words of verse 7 when He commanded us not to worry (Matthew 6:25–34)—not when receiving bad news and not when dreading bad news. What things might tempt a man to worry? How does a heart steadfast in the Lord aid in overcoming worry and fear?

9. Are verses 8 and 13 being somehow vindictive with their emphasis on looking with satisfaction on one’s adversaries or enemies? How should a Christian understand this idea?

10. Think about the psalm’s description of a righteous man and name one thing that you will do this week to help you live righteously in one of those areas.

Small-Group Leader Guide

This guide will help guide you in discovering the truths of God's Word. It is not, however, exhaustive, nor is it designed to be read aloud during your session.

1. Before you begin, spend some time in prayer, asking God to strengthen your faith through a study of His Word. The Scriptures were written so that we might believe in Jesus Christ and have life in His name (John 20:31). Also, pray for participants by name.

2. Before your meeting, review the session material, read the Bible passages, and answer the questions in the spaces provided. Your familiarity with the session will give you confidence as you lead the group.

3. As a courtesy to participants, begin and end each session on time.

4. Have a Bible dictionary or similar resource handy to look up difficult or unfamiliar names, words, and places. Ask participants to help you in this task. Be sure that each participant has a Bible and a study guide.

5. Ask for volunteers to read introductory paragraphs and Bible passages. A simple "thank you" will encourage them to volunteer again.

6. See your role as a conversation facilitator rather than a lecturer. Don't be afraid to give participants time to answer questions. By name, thank each participant who answers; then invite other input. For example, you may say, "Thank you, Al. Would anyone else like to share?"

7. Now and then, summarize aloud what the group has learned by studying God's Word.

8. Remember that the questions provided are discussion starters. Allow participants to ask questions that relate to the session. However, keep discussions on track with the session.

9. Everyone is a learner! If you don't know the answer to a question, simply tell participants that you need time to look at more Scripture passages or to ask your pastor.

DAILY STUDY QUESTIONS

Monday Psalm 112:1-2

1. The answer, as so often with such questions, is “Yes!” The praise of the Lord is the right context for reading and learning from the psalm.

2. Since the commandments are from God, and since they are a concise articulation of His will for the right functioning of His creation, they are inherently good. Those who live in God’s way will learn to delight in the will of God, that is His commandments.

3. A blessed and mighty progeny is a worthy vision for a Christian man—and it is God’s promise. This is the outcome for those who strive to live as God directs, that is, in the fear of the Lord.

4. Upright means doing things God’s way. This happens only by grace through faith in Christ. One does not climb to this height but is raised there through faith and then strives to conform his living to the reality brought about by God’s declaration of faith.

Tuesday Psalm 112:3-4

1. Regardless of one’s situation in life, wealth and riches are present—though perhaps not to the extent that we might prefer.

2. It does not feel good to feel “poor” when God has promised wealth. The key is to remember the promise of verse 4: in darkness, God brings light.

3. Clearly, the breaking in of light happens on God’s timetable.

4. When our righteousness comes to us through faith in Christ, and is in fact actually the righteousness of Christ, then it does indeed endure forever.

Wednesday Psalm 112:5-6

1. We know the feeling of being cheated but perhaps tend to forget the fact that our injustice inflicts these feelings on others.

2. Perfect justice is always giving to another what is his or her righteous due as a child of God. Certainly this means treating wife, children, parents, and fellow employees and drivers with justice—a bit more difficult than we may readily recognize.

3. Clearly none of us has truly lived the full extent of the Golden Rule—the pinnacle of just living—in every relationship.

4. The reach of sin is long and demanding. It is wise to deal truthfully with past failures.

5. Indeed, why not!?

Thursday Psalm 112:7-8

1. A man's response to bad news varies with a multitude of factors. Oddly many people receive bad news with little reaction—internal or external. This may or may not be evidence of unwavering faith.

2. Strong and obvious reactions to bad news probably have more to do with personality than with a measure of faith. Even a healthy and vibrant Christian may break down in grief and suffering when receiving crushing news. This is simply the mark of being human. Even our Lord outwardly grieved at the death of Lazarus.

3. An emotionless response may actually send a message of apathy and indifference. Christians are not called to be stone-faced stoics in the face of disaster and difficulty. Confronted with severe challenges and devastating losses, the best Christian response may well be lamentation and mourning at the price of sin.

4. Perhaps the psalmist is not speaking about the actual reception of bad news as much as the debilitating fearful approach to life that results when one lives in perpetual worry about the possibility of receiving bad news. The righteous and blessed man will grieve when appropriate, but he will not spend his days living in dread and apprehension of receiving the bad news that will, admittedly, inevitably come.

5. In the twenty-first century, adversaries come in a wide variety of colors, sizes, shapes, and forms—some animate, some quite abstract. The comfort of the psalm is the reminder that in God's plan those adversaries that inject our lives with difficulty and sorrow will not have the last word.

Friday Psalm 112:9-10

1. When we are honest, there is usually plenty in our lives to make us doubt a claim to personal righteousness.

2. Giving to the poor today (we would call it charity) is a good barometer of one's level of righteousness or ability to live according to God's will. Compassion is God's will, and one who is righteous will certainly show compassion. This is righ-

teousness considered from the standpoint of our human responsibility as creatures within God's creation, but it is not the end-all and be-all.

3. The key, of course, is to remember that righteousness is of two kinds: our own (which is always deficient) and that which we receive from God through Christ (which is always sufficient). The wonder is that in the fulfillment of God's plan at the Last Day, you will be fully righteous in both ways, and that reality will last forever.

4. Unpleasant and terrifying as the description is, it is the consistent scriptural image illustrating the destiny of the wicked. This should provide significant impetus to lead people to faith so that they might escape the damnation of the wicked—those who refuse to yield to God's will.

5. It could be for the comfort of those who are consistently being downtrodden by the wicked. It could also serve as a vivid contrast between the two classes of people in the world. One is either righteous (by faith, of course) or is counted among the wicked. There is no middle ground shoehorned between verses 9 and 10.

S A M P L E

GROUP BIBLE STUDY

(Questions are on pp. 38–39.)

1. *What do you think of when you hear the word righteous? What does it mean to be righteous?*

Encourage the group to think beyond the expected standard Bible class answers. In regular life, what does it mean to be righteous? It is important to remember that in the Bible, righteousness is of two kinds. There is vertical or passive righteousness—the righteousness we receive from God by grace through faith in Jesus. And there is horizontal or active righteousness—the things that creatures do in service to one another that actually correspond with God’s will.

2. *Describe the most righteous man you have ever known. What was his most compelling quality or characteristic?*

This is intended to be a nonthreatening question that should lubricate the group’s willingness to talk and discuss. Give each participant an opportunity to respond with his thoughts.

3. *Is there a difference between being blessed and being righteous? Using the descriptions in the psalm, describe the characteristics of a man who is blessed and righteous.*

Essentially, no. Both describe the man who is rightly related to God through faith and rightly related to his fellow creatures by living according to the Creator’s will. Tracing through the psalm, one gains a good idea of what God means by blessed and righteous.

4. *Verse 1 declares that the first two criteria of blessedness are fear of the Lord and delight in His commandments. What does it mean to “fear the Lord”? How do these ideas fit with a Christian perspective?*

Although it contradicts widely held ideas, in the biblical world, fear of God definitely included an element of good old-fashioned terror. Certainly we have reverence and awe of God, but it is good to recall that the universal experience of biblical characters is that an intense awareness of the presence of God provokes sheer terror (check out Isaiah 6:1–5; Luke 8:22–25; Revelation 1:12–18; and Matthew 10:28). As sinful human beings, we are rightly afraid of a just God. This fear unquestionably remains as long as we live in this broken flesh. As C. S. Lewis wonderfully reminds us: Aslan (our Lord!) is not safe.

5. *The psalm counts children as one of the marks of God's blessing. What is the correlation between a man's righteousness (the righteousness he achieves by his faithful living) and the success of his heirs? What is the definition or mark of a successful child?*

How a man raises his children has everything to do with the success they experience in life—especially when success is defined in a biblical and Christian way: one who walks in the will of God and ably serves those around him. God's definition of success is often at odds with the world's concept of the same.

6. *Consider verse 4. In what tangible ways does God bring His light into the darkness?*

Perhaps the best way to think about God's light is not so much insight into what to do in a dark or confusing situation as it is the light of God's promises actively present and working in the midst of dark and challenging times. The light of God that shines in our darkness is delivered with regularity and certitude in the Means of Grace: God's Word and Sacraments that bring us the promises of His gifts.

7. *The old saying "neither a borrower nor a lender be" seems to contradict the exhortation of verse 5. What is the value in being willing to lend? Why are we often reluctant to follow the psalmist's urging?*

A benevolent and generous spirit is the mark of a man who is living with the right priorities and values—he understands the place of things and the significance of people. The psalm also hints that lending brings its own reward even in this life, as others may be willing to vouch for the one who previously has blessed them with magnitude and grace. Clearly, our culture functions with a markedly different understanding about possessions and the dangers in lending.

8. *Jesus concurred with the words of verse 7 when He commanded us not to worry (Matthew 6:25–34)—not when receiving bad news and not when dreading bad news. What things might tempt a man to worry? How does a heart steadfast in the Lord aid in overcoming worry and fear?*

Responsibilities for family members and business dealings that impact that care probably make up the bulk of worry promoters, but there is undoubtedly a long list of potential sources of worry. Remembering that God is profoundly and perfectly in control is no small comfort during challenging seasons of life.

9. *Are verses 8 and 13 being somehow vindictive with their emphasis on looking with satisfaction on one's adversaries or enemies? How should a Christian understand this idea?*

When God triumphs, evil is vanquished. When our enemies are resisting God's ways, then their defeat is a cause of satisfaction that the truth has prevailed. It is not about revenge or payback but is a matter of standing for truth and celebrating its triumph. At the Red Sea, Israel rejoiced, but Egypt grieved. This reality holds also for the Christian, as the Book of Revelation makes abundantly clear (see for example Revelation 6:9–11).

10. *Think about the psalm's description of a righteous man, and name one thing that you will do this week to help you live righteously in one of those areas.*

Don't be generic! Think about lending, aiding the poor, raising children, living without worry and so on, and then offer a concrete action you will do in one of those areas that will be a demonstration of righteousness.

S A M P L E