



# DISTRESS & HOPE

## STUDY GUIDE

These bible studies offer a brief introduction to the Psalms and the different ways the bible talks about distress and hope. God's word offers rich resources for expressing how we feel, and grounding ourselves in the sure hope we have in Jesus. Over the course of these studies we move from who we are created to be under God right through to the new creation, when all will be made right. In between, we look at how God's presence can be a comfort, the practice of lament, and how we can support each other as the family of God.

While these studies have been framed with some particular applications to mental ill health in mind, our prayer is that everyone who uses them will be encouraged in their walk with Jesus. Our world can be a dark place, where injustice occurs, and it seems like evil flourishes. You might be facing chronic illness, mourning the death of a loved one, or feeling overwhelmed in the face of past trauma. Wherever you are at we invite you into God's word, to sit at his feet - to mourn and weep and laugh and hope and marvel at what He has done, what He is doing and what He will do.

Lastly if these studies bring up anything particularly challenging for you, please do not deal with it alone. Speak to a friend or family member you trust. Let a member of the ministry team know. On the back page we have some resources as well, and our church has a list of local mental health professionals.

With love and hope,  
Liv and Julie





# IMAGE BEARERS

## PSALM 8

*For the director of music. According to gittith. A psalm of David.*

- <sup>1</sup> LORD, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
You have set your glory  
in the heavens.
- <sup>2</sup> Through the praise of children and infants  
you have established a stronghold against your enemies,  
to silence the foe and the avenger.
- <sup>3</sup> When I consider your heavens,  
the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars,  
which you have set in place,
- <sup>4</sup> what is mankind that you are mindful of them,  
human beings that you care for them?
- <sup>5</sup> You have made them a little lower than the angels  
and crowned them with glory and honour.
- <sup>6</sup> You made them rulers over the works of your hands;  
you put everything under their feet:
- <sup>7</sup> all flocks and herds,  
and the animals of the wild,
- <sup>8</sup> the birds in the sky,  
and the fish in the sea,  
all that swim the paths of the seas.
- <sup>9</sup> LORD, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!



## STUDY ONE

(Psalm 8, Hebrews 2:5-18, Genesis 1-3, Philippians 2:5-11)

Do you have a favourite part of God's Creation?  
What about it delights/amazes/captivates you?

Read Genesis 1:1-31

1) What do we learn about God?

2) What do we learn about human beings?

Read Psalm 8

3) How does Psalm 8 reflect on the creation account? (What things are highlighted from Creation in the Psalm?)

4) In Psalm 8:1, the word "**glory**" is used. What is **glory**, and why is it significant that humans are "**crowned with glory**" in v. 5?

5) Where do we see limits in God's creation? (Genesis 1)

6) What limits are placed on humanity? (Genesis 2)

- 7) What do the limitations God has placed on creation show us, and what should this lead us to do? (ie. how should we respond?)

Read Genesis 3

- 8) How do Adam and Eve respond to the limitation placed on them to not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16)?

- 9) What further limitations are now given to humanity as a result of their actions?

In Psalm 8:2, there is a phrase that doesn't seem to be in keeping with the rest of the Psalm:

*"Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger."*

It stands out by its difference, so let's explore this further...

- 10) Who is/are the enemy/enemies of God? (ie. the foe/avenger)

See Genesis 3:15, Psalm 2:1-2, 1 Corinthians 15:25-26, Hebrews 2:14, James 4:4, Revelation 12:9

- 11) How is the enemy resisted/defeated according to the Psalm?

12) Why "children and infants"?

13) What does "praise" involve? (*Hint: it isn't just about singing!*)

14) What does this tell us about weakness, limitations and dependence?

15) How might this tie in with Genesis 3:15-16?

16) How does God show that he cares for humanity, even after the fall? (Psalm 8:4)

Read Hebrews 2:5-18 (*Psalm 8 is cited in v. 6-8*)

17) According to Hebrews, why does Jesus come to share in humanity's "flesh and blood"? (v.14) *See also Philippians 2:5-11*

18) Hebrews 2:9-10 tells us that Jesus is crowned with glory and honour and that sons and daughters are brought to glory through Him. How is this accomplished, and how does this shape our understanding of Psalm 8?

19) Jesus embraced the limitations of humanity. How does this help us view our own limitations, and how might this encourage you if/when you find your capacity (physical, mental or emotional) isn't what you (or others) think it ought to be?

20) How does knowing God's character, his purposes for his people, and the hope of glory, as reflected in the Psalm, help us as we live in the imperfections and the limitations of the here and now?



You give life, You are love  
You bring light to the darkness  
You give hope, You restore every heart  
that is broken  
And great are You, Lord

It's Your breath in our lungs  
So we pour out our praise, we pour out  
our praise  
It's Your breath in our lungs  
So we pour out our praise to You only

Taken from: *Great are you Lord*  
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CCLI song # 6460220





# PRESENCE

## PSALM 139

*For the director of music. Of David. A psalm.*

- 1 You have searched me, LORD,  
and you know me.
- 2 You know when I sit and when I rise;  
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
- 3 You discern my going out and my  
lying down; you are familiar with all my  
ways.
- 4 Before a word is on my tongue  
you, LORD, know it completely.
- 5 You hem me in behind and before,  
and you lay your hand upon me.
- 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for  
me, too lofty for me to attain.
- 7 Where can I go from your Spirit?  
Where can I flee from your  
presence?
- 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are  
there;  
if I make my bed in the depths, you  
are there.
- 9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
if I settle on the far side of the sea,  
10 even there your hand will guide me,  
your right hand will hold me fast.
- 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide  
me and the light become night around  
me,"  
12 even the darkness will not be dark to  
you; the night will shine like the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.
- 13 For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's  
womb.
- 14 I praise you because I am fearfully  
and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful,  
I know that full well.
- 15 My frame was not hidden from you  
when I was made in the secret place,  
when I was woven together in the  
depths of the earth.
- 16 Your eyes saw my unformed body;  
all the days ordained for me were  
written in your book  
before one of them came to be.
- 17 How precious to me are your  
thoughts, God!  
How vast is the sum of them!
- 18 Were I to count them,  
they would outnumber the grains of  
sand—  
when I awake, I am still with you.
- 19 If only you, God, would slay the  
wicked!  
Away from me, you who are  
bloodthirsty!
- 20 They speak of you with evil intent;  
your adversaries misuse your name.
- 21 Do I not hate those who hate you,  
LORD,  
and abhor those who are in rebellion  
against you?
- 22 I have nothing but hatred for them;  
I count them my enemies.
- 23 Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious  
thoughts.
- 24 See if there is any offensive way in  
me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.



## STUDY TWO

(Psalm 139, Hebrews 4:14-5:10, Psalms 23, 27 & 84, Matthew 1:21-25, Colossians 1:15-23)

How well do we know people?

Who do you know best and how did you come to know them to this degree?

### Read Psalm 139

1) This Psalm outlines the intimate knowledge God has about the psalmist. Outline all the things that God knows:

2) What stands out to you? Why?

3) How does this knowledge make the psalmist feel?

4) What might make someone want to flee from God's presence (v.7)?

*(See Genesis 3:8, Numbers 10:35, Jonah 1:1-3, Colossians 1:21, Revelation 6:15-17)*

5) Why would contemplating God's intimate knowledge of himself, lead the psalmist (in this case, king David) to think about God's enemies in v.19-22?

- 6) According to David, what are the characteristics of God's enemies? (*Also, review STUDY ONE question 10 for a reminder about who God's enemies are.*)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 7) Why might he count God's enemies as his own enemies? (v.22)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 8) In these verses (19-22) he uses very strong and harsh language, is this merited? (Why/ why not?) How does this line up with Jesus' command to "*love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you*" (Matthew 5:44)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 9) What does thinking about God's enemies prompt the psalmist to do in v. 23-24? Why would he do this?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 10) What is meant by "*the way everlasting*"? (v.24)

Since before Genesis, God's purpose and plan was to be **with** His people, as in the garden of Eden. This was seen tangibly on Mt Sinai, in the tabernacle and in the temple. These were not the full experience of God's presence, but they provided a longing for what was to come. God promised that he *would* be with his people, and that he *would* make a way for them to be with Him forever. We see a yearning in Scripture for God to dwell with His people and for the people to be in the presence of God. (See Psalm 23:6, 27:4, 84:1-2,10)

Matthew 1:21-25

11) What does Jesus' name indicate about him and what he would do?

Colossians 1:15-23

12) What does it mean that all God's fullness "dwells" in Christ?

13) What has Jesus done so that we can dwell with God?

Hebrews 4:14-5:10

14) Why is Jesus able to empathise with our weaknesses? How does this encourage us when we are feeling weak?

15) What does it mean in v.8 when it says that Jesus "*learned obedience from what he suffered*"?

16) How might this speak into our suffering?

- 17) Psalm 139:23 asks God to test and know the psalmist's "anxious thoughts" or "cares". How does thinking about God's knowledge of you and what he has done in Christ for you shape/change/inform any of your own 'anxious thoughts'?
- 18) What things are comforting about God's presence and his intimate knowledge of all your circumstances and even your deepest thoughts?
- 19) One of the impacts of mental ill health can be feeling isolated and alone, how could these passages be a comfort?

Though I walk through the valley  
and I can't see the way  
When the shadows surround me I will not be afraid  
For I know You are with me You will always provide

Though the path may be lonely  
You will stay by my side  
I will rest my soul I'll trust in You alone  
For the Lord my Shepherd leads me, leads me

And He is all I need in the darkest valley  
I know, I know my Shepherd is all I need



Taken from: *Shepherd*  
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Jonny Robinson, Rich Thompson  
CCLI song # 7073334





# LAMENT

## PSALM 42

*For the director of music. A maskil of the Sons of Korah.*

**1** As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.

**2** My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

When can I go and meet with God?

**3** My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long,

“Where is your God?”

**4** These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng.

**5** Why, my soul, are you downcast?

Why so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God,  
for I will yet praise him,  
my Saviour and my God.

**6** My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon - from Mount Mizar.

**7** Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me.

**8** By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me - a prayer to the God of my life.

**9** I say to God my Rock, “Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?”

**10** My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long,

“Where is your God?”

**11** Why, my soul, are you downcast?

Why so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God,  
for I will yet praise him,  
my Saviour and my God.



## STUDY THREE

(Psalm 42, Psalm 22, Matthew 26:36-40 & 27:45-54)

How does our society deal with grief, tragedy and/or anguish?

Read Psalm 42

1) What things stand out to you about the Psalm? Does anything surprise you?

2) What questions are asked in the Psalm?

3) Who is asking each question, and to whom are each of the questions addressed?

4) What is causing the psalmist distress? (v.1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11)

5) What does the psalmist accuse God of? (v.7, 9)

6) Have the psalmist's problems been resolved at the end of the Psalm?

- 7) What truths does the psalmist declare/affirm about God even as he pours out his grief and anguish?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 8) What does the psalmist hope for? (v. 5, 11)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 9) What might be the purpose of the Psalm (especially if the problems are not resolved immediately, or may not be resolved for a long time)?

Psalm 22

- 10) Make a note of how the psalmist expresses distress/grief and what he requests, and what he affirms about God in his grief.

Distress:

Requests/pleas:

Truths about God affirmed:

- 11) What is the hope expressed in this Psalm?

Matthew 26:36-46 & 27:45-54

12) When Jesus faces his darkest moments, what does he do in his deep sorrow? (See also 1 Peter 2:21-23)

13) What does having Psalm 22 on his lips as he is dying show about Jesus' suffering and his hope?

14) Are there any scriptures that are a comfort to you when you are struggling, or in deep distress?

15) Do you struggle to be honest about your emotions when you pray, why or why not?



How long until injustice is put right?  
How long until we see the morning light?  
How long until we see the wicked fall?  
How long until you come and fix it all?  
When will the searing burning light  
Burn off the darkness of this night?

The end of evil dark powers fall  
The earth and heaven will be reborn  
We'll be made new body and soul  
And we'll be coming home  
Until then O Lord your people cry  
How long?

Taken from: *How Long?*  
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CCLI Song # 7090334



Write your own prayer of lament (or do it as a group) using the following guide:

## LEARNING TO LAMENT

### ***Psalms of Lament***

Personal- 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 13, 17, 22, 25, 26, 28, 31, 39, 42, 43, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 70, 71, 77, 86, 120, 141, 142

Corporate- 12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 94, 123, 126

<b>Movements of lament</b>	<b>Psalm ____</b>	<b>My Lament</b>
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### ***Turn to God***

Address God as you come to Him in prayer.

### ***Bring your complaint***

Identify in blunt language the specific pain or injustice. *Why?* or *How?* Is often part of the complaint.

### ***Ask Boldly***

Specifically call on God to act in a manner that fits His character and resolves your complaint.

### ***Choose to trust***

Affirm God's worthiness to be trusted, and commit to praising Him.

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## PSALM 133

*A song of ascents. Of David.*

- 1 How good and pleasant it is  
when God's people live together in unity!**
- 2 It is like precious oil poured on the head,  
running down on the beard,  
running down on Aaron's beard,  
down on the collar of his robe.**
- 3 It is as if the dew of Hermon  
were falling on Mount Zion.  
For there the Lord bestows his blessing,  
even life forevermore.**



## STUDY FOUR

(Psalm 133, Romans 12, Ephesians 4:1-16, 1 John 4:7-21)

When/where do you most feel like you belong?

### Read Psalm 133

1) In the Old Testament, who are God's people? From a New Testament Perspective who are God's people?

2) What does the psalmist desire for God's people?

In verse 2, when describing how good unity is for God's people, the psalmist uses a very unusual analogy: that of oil on the head and running down Aaron's beard onto his robe!

3) Who is Aaron, and what was his role in Israel? (See *Exodus 28:1-3, 29:4-9*)

4) Why would precious oil on the head and oil running down Aaron's beard be a good thing? (See *Exodus 30:30-32*)

5) Why does the psalmist use this image, and what does it tell us about what is needed for unity?

The next image of something good and pleasant is dew from **Mount Hermon** falling on **Zion**.

Some helpful things to know:

**Zion** is also called the city of David, it is another name for Jerusalem, but it is often used to describe God's people and/or the perfected place where God dwells with his people forever.

**Mount Hermon** is located in the far north of Israel. It is one of the highest points in the region. Significantly, it is snow-capped, and the dew that descends on its heights contrasts with the arid surrounding areas.

Additionally, Hermon is a major source of the Jordan River. When the ice caps thaw, water from Hermon flows down to water the whole land.

6) What does the use of this image evoke? (See *Genesis 2: 5-6 & 10, Deuteronomy 8:7-9, 11:11-12, 32:1-3*)

7) What is the overall picture that this Psalm is giving us?

Romans 12:1-21 & Ephesians 4:1-16

8) What is the common theme in these passages?

9) Make a list of all the different roles/gifts that Paul describes:

10) What is the purpose of these?

11) What is the ultimate goal?

12) How is this possible?

13) What ways do you see our church living out what Paul describes in these passages?

14) What areas do we as a church need to grow in?

15) What about you personally? How are you challenged by these passages?

John 13:34-35 & 1 John 4:7-21, underline or highlight the word love as you go.

16) Where does love come from?

17) What does true love look like?

18) How do we become loving?

19) How can we show loving care to those who are experiencing difficulties/ affliction?

20) What are some practical ways your group could support someone at church who has shared a mental health struggle?

Sister, let me wipe your tears  
Brother, let me bear your fears  
Come on, every daughter, every son  
Let us walk in love, for we are one

Though, we walk a long, and broken road  
We are here to bear each other's load  
And forgive as You've forgiven us  
Let us walk in love, for we are one

Taken from: *We Are One*  
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CCLI Song # 7145090





# HOPE

## PSALM 17

*A prayer of David*

**1** Hear me, LORD, my plea is just; listen to my cry. Hear my prayer - it does not rise from deceitful lips.

**2** Let my vindication come from you; may your eyes see what is right.

**3** Though you probe my heart, though you examine me at night and test me, you will find that I have planned no evil; my mouth has not transgressed.

**4** Though people tried to bribe me, I have kept myself from the ways of the violent through what your lips have commanded.

**5** My steps have held to your paths; my feet have not stumbled.

**6** I call on you, my God, for you will answer me; turn your ear to me and hear my prayer.

**7** Show me the wonders of your great love, you who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes.

**8** Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings

**9** from the wicked who are out to destroy me, from my mortal enemies who surround me.

**10** They close up their callous hearts, and their mouths speak with arrogance.

**11** They have tracked me down, they now surround me, with eyes alert, to throw me to the ground.

**12** They are like a lion hungry for prey, like a fierce lion crouching in cover.

**13** Rise up, LORD, confront them, bring them down; with your sword rescue me from the wicked.

**14** By your hand save me from such people, LORD, from those of this world whose reward is in this life. May what you have stored up for the wicked fill their bellies; may their children gorge themselves on it, and may there be leftovers for their little ones.

**15** As for me, I will be vindicated and will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness.





1 Peter 1:3-12

7) How has Jesus made what was expressed in Psalm 17:15 a certain hope for us?

8) Why are the readers of Peter's letter able to rejoice in suffering?

9) How is being "*filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy*" (v.8) different from being happy?

10) When we are suffering, our emotions can feel like they are always changing, how could knowing *inexpressible and glorious joy* be an anchor in times of trial?

Revelation 21:1-7

11) What is your first impression of the "new order of things"?

12) What excites you the most about this picture?

13) Make a list of things that were part of the first heaven and first earth that are now passing away:

14) What is the reason that those things will not be in the new creation?

15) How does that give us hope for our life now?

16) Mental illness health can make it difficult to feel like healing is possible. How does the hope of the new creation impact how we think about healing?

17) How can we encourage each other to remember the hope we have in Jesus?



How I long to breathe the air of Heaven  
Where pain is gone and mercy fills the streets  
To look upon the One who bled to save me  
And walk with Him for all eternity

There will be a day when all will bow before Him  
There will be a day when death will be no more  
Standing face to face with He who died and  
rose again  
Holy, holy is the Lord

Taken from: *Hymn of Heaven*

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## Mental Health Support

If you or someone you are with is in immediate danger, call 000

**Lifeline:** 13 1114 <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

**Beyond Blue:** 1300 224 636 <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

**1800 Respect** (DV/sexual assault helpline)

<https://1800respect.org.au/>

**Mental Health Line:** 1800 011 511

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/Pages/mental-health-line.aspx>

We don't want you to walk alone, please let someone you trust know that you are struggling.

### Resources:

- **The Mental Health and Pastoral Care Institute**
- <https://mentalhealthinstitute.org.au/?v=8bcc25c96aa5> – resources, factsheets, recordings and upcoming events centred around a Christian understanding of pastoral care and mental health. A good introduction.
- **Down Not Out** by Chris Cipollone – a mix of lived experience and theological insight. A good introduction.
- **Mental Health and Your Church A Handbook for Biblical Care** by Helen Thorne and Dr Steve Midgley - sections introducing different types of mental ill health and practical steps for caring well for each other.
- **Finding Lost Words: The Churches Right to Lament** edited by Geoff Harper and Kit Barker – a more technical series of essays on Lament in the Psalms.
- **Wayfarers: A Christian Approach to Mental Health Care** by Warren Kinghorn– a more technical read on a Christian approach to mental health care including history, theology, philosophy and psychiatry.
- **Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament** by Mark Vroegop - a guide to expressing sorrow and pain to God through lament, finding solace and trust in His grace during life's darkest moments. It looks at lament in general and then specifically at some of the lament Psalms as well as Lamentations.

