

# Psalm 6 – In The Valley: Grief

*Many questions are provided for your review, please feel free to skip/alter any to suit your group.*

*Questions are organised into segments; each segment is there to discuss different aspects of Psalm 6 and the topic of Grief. Please don't feel any pressure to ask every question, this is an emotional and personal topic, the priority of the group should be to listen carefully to each other and to what God's word has to teach us.*

## The Big Picture

This series, *In the Valley*, deals with emotions, specifically with those emotions that are often considered to be “negative” emotions, although we will challenge that idea at times. The aim is to look not only at our own experiences with emotions, but also at biblical perspectives and biblical characters who show these emotions.

Each week will focus on a different emotion and a different Psalm that expresses that particular emotion. This week the emotion is grief, and it is one many of us are familiar with. Grief is about our response to personal loss that we experience. Most often we associate grief with the death of a person that we love but we grieve over other losses as well: lost employment, lost relationships, lost opportunities. It is rarely a comfortable subject and can leave us feeling raw and delicate. Discussion leaders should hold this in front of mind as they prepare and lead.

## Study 1: Grief

### Personal reflection

- What is your experience of grief? How recent was the last time you experienced grief?

### Read Psalm 6

**Have someone else read Psalm 6 in a different English translation (if available).**

- Is there a moment from your life that this passage reminds you of?

### Biblical reflection

- Why do you think David (the author) starts by asking God not to be angry with him?
- How does David describe the physical and emotional aspects of grief in this Psalm?
- In verse 3 David asks ‘*How long, Lord, how long?*’ Have you ever found yourself asking this question of God? What were your circumstances at the time?
- What truths about God does David draw on as he wrestles with his grief?

## Grief

Grief is an emotion that we all experience from time to time.

- Do you see grief as a positive or *negative* emotion?
- Do you talk about your grief, or is it a taboo subject in your family/friendship circles?
- When is it appropriate to talk about grief?
- What are some good and bad ways to bring up the topic of grief?
- Can grief become unhealthy? When?

## Jesus and Grief

### Read Matthew 14:13-21

- Having heard about John's death why do you think Jesus sets out for a desolate place?
- Jesus had compassion on the crowd and healed them. How might Jesus' feelings of grief and loss have influenced his response to the crowd?
- Jesus wept with grief at Lazarus' death (John 11:35). How do you feel about the Son of God crying in public?

## God, Grief and you – what to do about it?

- Does the way David processes his grief provide a helpful guide for you in your own life? If yes, how?
- Psalm 6 ends with 3 verses on a triumphant note. Given the context and topic, what do you make of this reversal?
- The Psalms were written pre-Jesus. Given what Jesus achieved in his life, death and resurrection, might we have a different view of grief to that expressed in Psalm 6?

## For Prayer

God hears every prayer, and when you feel like you are in the valley, it can be helpful to remember a verse like *The Lord has heard my cry for mercy (Psalm 6:9)*.

The Prayer Course ([prayercourse.org](http://prayercourse.org)) teaches us that whilst we often ask God 'why' we are in the valley, a better question to ask is: God, I feel like I'm in an emotional valley, 'where' are you God? More often than not, his answer will be: I'm here with you.

# Psalm 56 – In The Valley: Fear

*Many questions are provided for your review, please feel free to skip/alter any to suit your group. Questions are organised into segments; each segment is there to discuss different aspects of Psalm 56 and the topic of Fear. Please don't feel any pressure to ask every question, this is an emotional and personal topic, the priority of the group should be to listen carefully to each other and to what God's word has to teach us.*

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Each week will focus on a different emotion and a different Psalm that expresses that particular emotion. This week the emotion is Fear, and it is one many of us are familiar with. Fear is about our response to unknown situations and unpleasant prospects. Most often we associate Fear with being attacked, upcoming consequences and expected trials and difficulties. It is rarely a comfortable subject and can leave us feeling raw and delicate. Discussion leaders should hold this in front of mind as they prepare and lead.

Helpful definition of fear: “a feeling of looming potential loss.”

## Study 2: Fear

### Personal reflection

- What is your experience of Fear? How recent was that experience?
- Approximately 14% of Australians will experience an anxiety disorder this year, is this an issue impacting your life at the moment?

### Read Psalm 56

**Have someone else read Psalm 56 in a different English translation (if available).**

- Is there a moment from your life that this passage reminds you of?
- David speaks of his enemies causing him fear, are you facing an adversary of some kind?
- In verse 8, David talks about his tears, how does fear link to last week's topic of grief?

### Biblical reflection

- Why do you think David (the author) starts by asking God to be merciful with him?
- How does David describe the physical and emotional aspects of Fear in this Psalm?
- What do you think it is like to be pursued by an enemy? Is that something you have experience with?
- In verse 1 David asks: ‘Be merciful to me, my God’ Have you ever found yourself asking this question of God? What were your circumstances at the time?
- What truths about God does David draw on as he wrestles with his Fear?

## Fear

Fear is an emotion that we all experience from time to time.

- Do you see Fear as a positive or negative emotion?
- Do you talk about your Fear, or is it a taboo subject in your family/friendship circles?
- Is it 'manly' to have fears or to express them? Is it socially acceptable for women to express fears? In what ways?
- When is it appropriate to talk about Fear? What are the best circumstances to talk about Fear?
- Brainstorm examples of good Fear (from a Christian perspective).
- Brainstorm examples of bad Fear.

## Jesus and Fear

*Think on the crucifixion and Jesus praying at the garden of gethsemane*

### Read Matthew 26:36-46

- Here Jesus prays for "this cup [to] pass from me" (26:39), does it appear as if Jesus is afraid? What do you make of the son of God possibly having been afraid?
- Jesus' friends were brought along to 'keep watch with Jesus', (and they failed at this task) why do you think Jesus asked them to do this?
- Jesus knew that Judas was about to betray him, and beyond that lay the cross, how would that have affected Him?

## God, Fear and you – what to do about it?

- Does the way David place his trust and his Fear with God provide a helpful guide for you in your own life? If yes, how?
- The Psalm has David both plead for, and accept as granted, his deliverance through God; is this a pattern of prayer we as Christians should adopt?
- The Psalms were written pre-Jesus. Given what Jesus achieved in his life, death and resurrection, might we have a different view of Fear to that expressed in Psalm 56?

## For Prayer

God hears every prayer, and when you feel like you are in the valley, it can be helpful to remember words such as: "...in God I trust and am not afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?" (Psalm 56:4).

Think on your own fears and ask God to help you with them.

# Psalm 137 – In The Valley: Anger

*Many questions are provided for your review, please feel free to skip/alter any to suit your group. Questions are organised into segments; each segment is there to discuss different aspects of Psalm 137 and the topic of Anger. Please don't feel any pressure to ask every question, this is an emotional and personal topic, the priority of the group should be to listen carefully to each other and to what God's word has to teach us.*

## The Big Picture

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Each week will focus on a different emotion and a different Psalm that expresses that particular emotion. This week the emotion is Anger, and it is one many of us are familiar with. Anger is about our frustration and passionate disappointment. We often associate anger with being attacked, frustration and passion. It is rarely a comfortable subject and can leave us feeling raw and delicate. Discussion leaders should hold this in front of mind as they prepare and lead.

Helpful definition of Anger: “A state of indignation and outrage, often resulting from distress caused by injustice or insult.<sup>1</sup>”

## Study 3: Anger

### Personal reflection

- What is your experience of Anger? How recent was that experience?
- How often do you find yourself on the receiving side of someone's anger and how often do you express it yourself?
- What actions tend to flow out of you when you are angry? How do you feel about that aspect of yourself?
- Is it ok to be angry? Can you think of examples of good anger as well as bad anger?

### Biblical reflection

#### Read Psalm 137

**Have someone else read Psalm 137 in a different English translation (if available).**

*See appendix for an image of a lyre from Egypt*

- Is there a moment from your life that this passage reminds you of?
- What emotions are expressed in this passage?
- What historical circumstances lie behind this Psalm?
- ‘Remembering’ is a key theme in this Psalm. Who does the remembering? What are they to remember? When are they doing this remembering (past, present or future)?
- How does remembering relate to anger?

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<sup>1</sup> Manser, M. H. (2009). [\*Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies\*](#). London: Martin Manser.

- The passage ends with blessings for whomever takes the babies of Babylon and kills them, how does this make you feel?
- Have you ever been angry enough to wish harm on another? What did you do?
- What truths about God does the author draw on as he wrestles with his Anger?

### Jesus and Anger

*Think on the reactions of the Pharisees when Jesus heals the man with a withered hand*

### Read Mark 3:1-6

- Why is Jesus angry?
- The Pharisees went out and planned to destroy Jesus, why?
- Do you think that Jesus' anger is different to that of the pharisees?

### God, Anger and you – what to do about it?

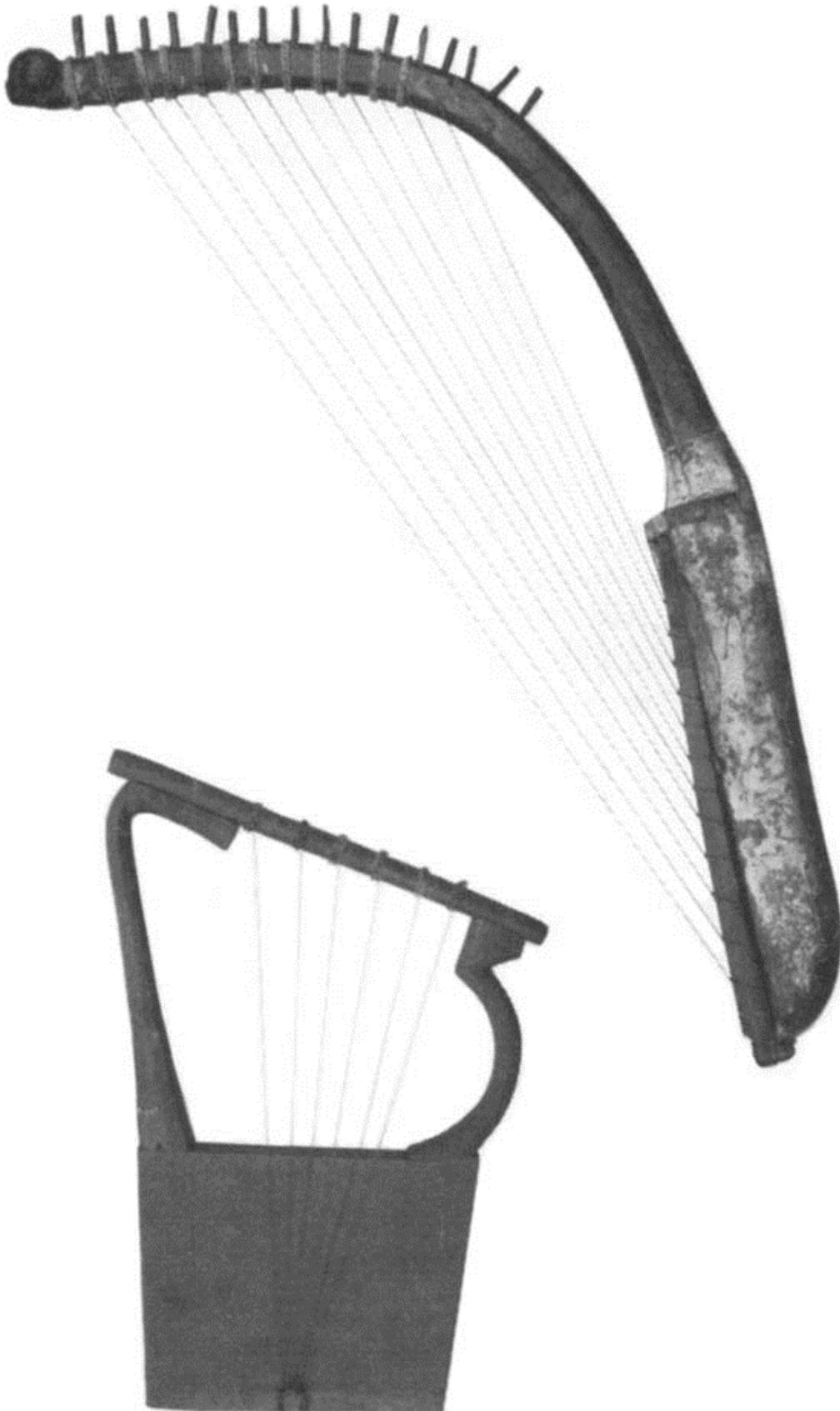
- Have you ever been angry with God? Is this acceptable?
- Does the way the psalmist expresses his anger to God provide a helpful guide for you in your own life? Why?
- The Psalm pleads for the destruction of his enemies, is this something we as Christians should do? Is it consistent with Romans 12:19-20?
- In Ephesians 4:26 Paul says 'In your anger do not sin'. What might this look like in practice?

### For Prayer

God hears every prayer, and when you feel like you are in the valley, it can be helpful to remember that Jesus also wrestled with anger, remember the time in the marketplace of the temple where he drove everyone out in a display of righteous anger. Think on how Jesus was angry at the pharisees when he healed that man's hand, and how he acted, and remember that Jesus dealt with anger, so can you.

Think on your own Angers and ask God to help you with them.

Appendix – Egyptian lyre and harp



# Psalm 38 – In The Valley: Guilt

*Many questions are provided for your review, please feel free to skip/alter any to suit your group. Questions are organised into segments; each segment is there to discuss different aspects of Psalm 38 and the topic of Guilt. Please don't feel any pressure to ask every question, this is an emotional and personal topic, the priority of the group should be to listen carefully to each other and to what God's word has to teach us.*

## The Big Picture

This series, *In the Valley*, deals with emotions, specifically with those emotions that are often considered to be “negative” emotions, although we will challenge that idea at times. The aim is to look not only at our own experiences with emotions, but also at biblical perspectives and biblical characters who show these emotions.

Each week will focus on a different emotion and a different Psalm that expresses that particular emotion. This week the emotion is Guilt, and it is one many of us are familiar with. Guilt is about our failures and wrongs. Most often we associate Guilt with failing, shame and judgement. It is rarely a comfortable subject and can leave us feeling raw and delicate. Discussion leaders should hold this in front of mind as they prepare and lead.

Helpful definition of Guilt: “Primarily a state of being at fault, often accompanied by a feeling of being in the wrong<sup>2</sup>.”

## Study 4: Guilt

### Personal reflection

- What is your experience of guilt? How recent was that experience?
- How often do you find yourself feeling guilty and how often are you ‘guilted’ into doing something you don’t want to do?
- What is the difference between guilt and shame?
- When you feel guilt, how do you respond, especially to other people? (e.g. some people might find they are attacking others when they feel guilty) How do you feel about the way you respond?
- We have discussed fear, anger and grief, how are these emotions linked to guilt?

### Read Psalm 38

**Have someone else read Psalm 38 in a different English translation (if available).**

- Is there a moment from your life that this passage reminds you of?
- This psalm speaks of people who seek the suffering of David, how can you relate to David here?

### Biblical reflection

- The first 8 verses speak of the feeling of guilt, can you relate to these verses specifically?
- How does David describe the physical and emotional aspects of guilt in this Psalm?
- What truths about God does David draw on as he wrestles with his guilt?

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<sup>2</sup> Manser, M. H. (2009). [Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies](#). London: Martin Manser.

## Guilt

Guilt is an emotion that we all experience from time to time.

- Is it ok to feel guilt? To feel guilty?
- Do you see guilt as a positive or negative emotion?
- Do you talk about your guilt, or is it a taboo subject in your family/friendship circles?
- When is it appropriate to talk about Guilt? What are the best circumstances to talk about Guilt?

## Jesus and Guilt

### Read Romans 8:1

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

### God, Guilt and you – what to do about it?

- What does Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross, and subsequent resurrection, have to do with human guilt? Discuss the different analogies and angles the group has heard.
- Because of what Jesus achieved, should Christians ever feel guilty?
- In Psalm 38, David acknowledges his guilt before God and cries out for his mercy and support, is this a practice followers of Jesus should adopt?
- When we talk to God about our sin and feelings of guilt, what is a helpful biblical mindset to take into those prayers?
- The Psalms were written before Jesus. Given what Jesus achieved in his life, death and resurrection, might we have a different view of Guilt to that expressed in Psalm 38?

## For Prayer

God hears every prayer, and when you feel like you are in the valley, it can be helpful to remember that Jesus came to remove all sins, and all reasons to feel Guilt. Remember that in His blood you are no longer a sinner, as Jesus’ blood saved you not only from the wrongs you have committed but also your future mistakes and wrongs.

Think on your own Guilt and ask God to help you with them.

God is slow to anger and full of compassion.

He forgives all who humbly repent and trust in his Son as Saviour and Lord.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

# Psalm 88 – In The Valley: Despair

*Many questions are provided for your review, please feel free to skip/alter any to suit your group. Questions are organised into segments; each segment is there to discuss different aspects of Psalm 88 and the topic of Despair. Please don't feel any pressure to ask every question, this is an emotional and personal topic, the priority of the group should be to listen carefully to each other and to what God's word has to teach us.*

## The Big Picture

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Each week will focus on a different emotion and a different Psalm that expresses that particular emotion. This week the emotion is Despair, and it is one many of us are familiar with. Despair is about doubt and low confidence. Most often we associate Despair with failures, a lack of hope and intense grief. It is rarely a comfortable subject and can leave us feeling raw and delicate. Discussion leaders should hold this in front of mind as they prepare and lead.

### **de•spair•ing** *adjective*

given to, arising from, or marked by despair: devoid of hope: to lose all hope or confidence<sup>3</sup>  
**synonym** see DESPONDENT

## Study 5: Despair

### Personal reflection

- What is your experience of Despair? How recent was that experience?
- How often do you find yourself feeling Despair and how often does your despair lead you into questionable choices or inaction?
- Do you find yourself lashing out at others due to your despair? how do you feel about that aspect of yourself?
- We have discussed fear, anger, grief and guilt; are any of these emotions linked to Despair?

### Despair

Despair is an emotion that we all experience from time to time.

- Is it ok to feel Despair?
- Do you see Despair as a positive or negative emotion?
- Do you talk about your Despair, or is it a taboo subject in your family/friendship circles?
- When is it appropriate to talk about Despair? What are the best circumstances to talk about Despair?
- Can Despair be good? can it be bad?
- Can there be multiple kinds/forms for Despair to manifest? If yes, What might they be?

### Read Psalm 88

**Have someone else read Psalm 88 in a different English translation (if available).**

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<sup>3</sup> Merriam-Webster, I. (2003). [Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary](#). (Eleventh ed.). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc.

Sheol - In ordinary usage it means ravine, chasm, underworld, or world of the dead<sup>4</sup>

- Is there a moment from your life that this passage reminds you of?
- This psalm speaks of the suffering of Heman, how can you relate to Heman here?

### Biblical reflection

- The first 8 verses speak of the feeling of despair, can you relate to Heman in this?
- How does Heman describe the physical and emotional aspects of despair in this Psalm?
- What truths about God does Heman draw on as he wrestles with his despair?
- Heman says that he is a man who has no strength, how does this ring as true/false in your understanding of despair?
- Heman claims that God's wrath lies heavy upon him, given our knowledge of God's character, how much of this statement may be Heman's own despair talking?
- Heman speaks through his despair as if God has forsaken him, (look at verse 14), how much of our understanding of God requires that we *feel* his presence and how much should/can we rely on our knowledge of God, in the absence of emotional feeling?

### Jesus and Despair

*Think of Jesus on the Cross*

#### Read Mark 15:33-40

*“Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” – “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

#### God, Despair and you – what to do about it?

- Jesus felt despair on the cross, as His connection to God felt severed and he was alone. How was Jesus' experience the same as, and different from, our experience of despair?
- Does the way Heman expresses his despair to God provide a helpful guide for you in your own life? Why or why not?
- What difference does Jesus' death and resurrection make to our feelings of despair? Should we still pray like Psalm 88 as Christians?
- In the midst of despair what biblical truths and verses do you find most helpful? Make a list together.

### For Prayer

God hears every prayer, and when you are in the valley we can come to him. Take some time to pray as follows:

- Use Psalm 88 to acknowledge the reality that we (and our loved ones) feel despair at times
- Use the list of biblical truths/verses to thank God for the reality of what he has done for us even when we feel despairing
- Ask for God's wisdom for you and your group as you deal with despair and love those who are despairing

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<sup>4</sup> Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). [Sheol](#). In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 1948). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

# Psalm 27 – In The Valley: Hope

*Many questions are provided for your review, please feel free to skip/alter any to suit your group. Questions are organised into segments; each segment is there to discuss different aspects of Psalm 27 and the topic of Hope. Please don't feel any pressure to ask every question, this is an emotional and personal topic, the priority of the group should be to listen carefully to each other and to what God's word has to teach us.*

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Each week will focus on a different emotion and a different Psalm that expresses that particular emotion. This week the emotion is Hope, and it is, hopefully, one many of us are familiar with. Hope breaks the mould of ‘negative’ emotions. Most often we associate Hope with expectant success and promises fulfilled, though there is danger of disappointment in false hope. It is the most comfortable subject of the series, but disappointment can leave us feeling raw and delicate. Discussion leaders should hold this in front of mind as they prepare and lead.

Helpful definition of Hope: “a state of mind that believes something good will happen.”

## Study 6: Hope

### Personal reflection

- What is your experience of Hope? How recent was that experience?
- How often do you find yourself feeling Hope and how often does your Hope lead you into positive action? What about questionable choices or inaction?
- Is false hope a problem in your experience and how does it affect us?
- We have discussed fear, anger, grief, guilt and despair; are any of these emotions linked to Hope?

### Hope

Hope is an emotion that we all experience from time to time.

- Do you see Hope as a positive emotion always?
- When is it appropriate to talk about Hope? What are the best circumstances to talk about Hope?
- We are called to have hope in God, what does that look like?
- Have you ever had a moment of hope in God, only to find yourself disappointed?

### Read Psalm 27

**Have someone else read Psalm 27 in a different English translation (if available).**

- Is there a moment from your life that this passage reminds you of?
- This psalm speaks of the hope and confidence of David, how can you relate to David here?

### Biblical reflection

- How does David describe his emotional state in this Psalm?
- What truths about God does David draw on as he shares his feelings?
- What do we learn about David's relationship with God?

- What conclusions can we draw about God himself based on David's experiences?
- David ends this passage with the interrogative to wait for the Lord. How does waiting fit with hope?

### Jesus and Hope

*Think of Jesus resurrected*

#### **Read Romans 15:8-13**

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our saviour and of Christ Jesus *our Hope* (1 Timothy 1:1)

#### God, Hope and you – what to do about it?

- Jesus is described here as the root of Jesse, and is listed as the Gentiles' hope; what do you think this means?
- Jesus was sent to die for our sins, what does that mean and how does it influence your thinking around Hope?
- After naming Jesus (the root of Jesse) Paul then blesses the reader with hope in God and the Holy Spirit's power. Take a moment to think on this statement and discuss your thoughts.
- The Psalms were written pre-Jesus. Given what Jesus achieved in his life, death and resurrection, might we have a different/adjusted view of Hope to that expressed in Psalm 27?

#### For Prayer

God hears every prayer, and when you feel like you are in the valley, it can be helpful to remember that Jesus came to remove all sins and provide myriad reasons to feel Hope. Remember that as Jesus' blood saved, you have cause for everlasting hope, even when it seems far away. Think on your own Hopes and ask God to help you with them.