

## **PSALM 22**

### **I. Survey**

#### **A. Main Units**

- I. Lament and Reassurance (1-21)
- II. God is Worthy of Praise (22-31)

There is a distinct break at verse 22. What comes before this verse is a lament with verses of remembrance (of God's faithfulness) woven in. What begins with and follows verse 22 is the psalmist's escalating praise. In the first main unit, the psalmist is sharing his heart with God in lament. In the second main unit, the psalmist is praising God and calling on people to praise Him.

#### **Sub-Units**

- I. Lament and Reassurance (1-21)
  - God, Where Are You? (1-2)
  - Our Fathers Trusted You (3-5)
  - I Am Scorned (6-8)
  - You Have Been with Me from Birth (9-11)
  - I Feel Devoured by Enemies (12-18)
  - God, Save Me (19-21)
- II. God is Worthy of Praise (22-31)
  - Praise God Who Cares for the Afflicted (22-26)
  - Praise God Who Rules over All Forever (27-31)

### **B. Structural Relationships**

#### **1. Contrast**

The first main unit (1-21) is largely in contrast with the second (22-31). The first is a lament, while the second is praise. This contrast can already be seen within the first main unit, as the psalmist alternates between pure lament (1-2, 6-8, 12-18) and hints of reasons to trust God (3-5, 9-11, 19-21). Those areas of trust that somewhat counter the lament give rise, in part, to the praise that follows in the second main unit.

#### **Interpretive Questions**

What specifically is the psalmist contrasting between the first and second main unit and throughout the first main unit? What is involved in each element of the contrast? Why does the psalmist emphasize these differences? Why does the psalmist use contrast? What are the implications of this contrast?

## **Strategic Area**

Verse 22 is a strategic area that captures the contrasting shift from lament to praise.

## **2. Causation with Instrumentation**

Through the lament of the first main unit (1-21), the psalmist weaves reasons to have faith in God (3-5, 9-11, 19-21) with emphasis that God has always been there with His people, even when He seems far off in the present circumstances. Those words about God's faithfulness offer a reason that leads to the praise that follows in the second main unit (22-31).

It is interesting to note that these words about God's faithfulness are causes that lead to praise, even though the present circumstances have not been visibly resolved. (At least, the reader is not made aware of this.) In this regard, I would also suggest that the lament itself is a reason for praise. The psalmist is showing the reader that lament can be (and possibly should be) followed directly by praise and should even lead to or cause praise. Something about the process of lament enables the response of praise.

The instrumentation points to remembrance and recognition of God's faithfulness (3-5, 9-11), along with engagement with God (1-2, 11, 19-21) in this place of lament. It would appear to be by means of talking to God and actively remembering His faithfulness that the psalmist is able to shift into praise. God Himself is the means by which the psalmist's lament and remembrance cause praise. I would also suggest that the resulting praise has a further cause in bringing the psalmist beyond his lament, where he can see a resolution coming (26-31).

## **Interpretive Questions**

What is involved in the cause of lament, interaction with God, and remembrance of faithfulness? What is involved in the effect of praise? What are the precise and specific ways that the causal elements produce the effect? Why does the psalmist use causation to present the material in this psalm? What are the implications of this causation?

What is specifically and precisely involved in the means of remembrance and calling out to God? How does this means produce the end result of praise? What specifically and precisely is involved in the end result of praise? Why does the psalmist structure this material by instrumentation? What are the implications of this instrumentation?

## **Strategic Area**

Verse 24 is a bridge between the cause of lament and the effect of praise. It shows how one leads to the other through the instrumentation of God.

### 3. Cruciality

Verse 22 is a pivot verse. Prior to this pivot, the psalmist is lamenting his circumstances. He is also remembering God's faithfulness in earlier times (3-5, 9-10) and begging God to be present in the current circumstances (11, 19-21). While these contrasting passages offer a glimpse of hope during his lament, there is a distinct change in verse 22. Not only does the psalmist exchange his lament for praise. He also moves on to tell his readers of how God is present with the afflicted and hears their cries (24, 26). While this may, in hindsight, seem a natural conclusion to the psalmist's lament, the confidence that follows verse 22 is an abrupt change from the desperate (if somewhat hopeful) pleas that precede it. The pivot (22) allows for the pleas to transform into praise.

#### Interpretive Questions

What specifically and precisely is involved in the pivotal passage of verse 22? How does verse 22 cause the change in direction? How does verse 22 shed light on the material on both sides of the pivot? Why does the psalmist structure the material by cruciality? What are the implications of this cruciality?

#### Strategic Area

Verse 22 is the pivot verse.

### 4. Climax with Generalization

The psalm builds from a lament (1-21), in which the psalmist also tells himself he has reasons to trust God (3-5, 9-11), to a call for God to deliver him (19-21), then to a call for praise of God's faithfulness (22-26), and then to a more general yet intensified and climactic praise of God's forever reign over all the earth (27-31). Verses 27-31 represent the climax of the psalm, with verses 30-31 being the climactic verses that proclaim God's forever reign and His ultimate deliverance.

The lament begins with the psalmist focused on his individual plight (1-21). The praise builds to encompass God's forever rule over all the earth, including deliverance for His people (31). This leads from individual lament to climax of praise. God is shown to be worthy of praise (22-23, 25, 27-28), despite the situation of lament, and God is also shown to be big enough to cover all of the afflicted forever (26). In this way, the generalization intensifies the climax by showing how much bigger God is than the psalmist's immediate problems, and by showing God's willingness and ability to tend to every single person who is experiencing difficulties (26), even to the point of bringing deliverance to future generations (31).

### **Interpretive Questions**

What specially is involved in the climactic passage of verses 27-31 and especially verses 30-31? How does the climactic passage flow from the material that precedes it? How does the material that precedes the climax lead up to it? Why does the psalmist build climax into this psalm? What are the implications of this climax?

What is involved in the particulars of the psalmist's personal plight (1-21) that lead to the generalization (22-31)? How are these particulars (1-21) generalized in the material that follows (22-31)? Why does the psalmist use generalization? What are the implications of this generalization?

### **Strategic Area**

Verses 30-31 are the climactic verses within the climactic passage of verses 27-31.

### **5. Recurrences**

Far (1, 11, 19; and 24 by implication, i.e., God has not hidden)

Cry (2, 5, 24)

Praise (3, 22, 23, 25, 26)

Deliver, Save, Rescue (4, 5, 8, 20, 21, 31)

### **Interpretive Questions**

What is the precise and specific meaning of each recurring element? How do the individual recurrences relate to and shed light on each other? Why does the psalmist include these recurrences? What are the implications of these recurrences?

### **Strategic Area**

Verses 24-26 highlight and give meaning to the first three recurring elements. Verse 31 highlights and gives meaning to the fourth recurring element.

### **C. Psalm's Genre**

This is a lament psalm that resolves into a praise psalm. The praise seems to arise in the midst of the lament without resolving the circumstances, so it does not seem to be a typical thanksgiving-type psalm. The psalm also contains elements of confidence and trust, although these are interspersed with the lament and are not the main focus of the psalm. However, it is interesting to note that this psalm is directly followed by a trust/confidence psalm (Psalm 23), so those elements would seem to be important as well in Psalm 22.

## D. Atmosphere

The atmosphere begins in lament, with the psalmist describing a desperate, forlorn, and almost futile situation. However, even during this lament, the atmosphere allows a measure of hope, as the psalmist describes God's past faithfulness, both corporately and personally. There is also a measure of doubt which conflicts with hope. God was there before, but where is he now? There is no sense of resolution, so those two moods remain in tension. In verse 22, the atmosphere shifts into praise to the end of the psalm. Even so, the sense of earlier tension continues through verse 26. The sense of affliction has not ceased. What has changed is the confidence that God is there in that place of affliction and that He will continue to be faithful in taking care of the afflicted. There is the sense that their situation will be resolved at some point.

## II. Interpretation

### A. Analysis of Strategic Area

**a. Describe the shift from lament (vv. 1- 21) to praise/thanksgiving (vv. 22-31). What accounts for this shift?**

| Verse | Observation   | Inference   |
|-------|---|---|
| 22    | The psalmist makes a decision to praise God. In some respects, this decision seems to come out of nowhere, and that is significant. The psalmist is demonstrating that a person in lament can make a decision to praise, regardless of circumstances.                                       | At some point in the process of lament, a person needs to make an intentional decision to offer praise to God. Praise during lament is a sacrifice that shifts perspective. The conversation starts with lament, but lament leads to praise. At some point the person must intentionally make the choice to praise regardless of circumstances. |
| 22    | This is not the first time the psalmist mentions the word "praise." He has already acknowledged the "praises of Israel" in verse 3 and has identified those praises as the place where God is enthroned.  | If praise is where God lives, that would be the place to go to when God seems far away. The psalmist shows that his readers can go to that place simply by praising God. God has not left. His readers need to remember where He is and reorient themselves to that place through praise.   |
| 22    | Praising God is a follow-up response to crying out for God's whereabouts (1-2). The psalmist's search for God in his time of distress begins with a cry but ends with praise. In verse 3 the psalmist remembers God inhabits praise. This is the connector between verses 1-2 and verse 22. | God answers the cries of His people but the people also must respond and move toward Him to receive that answer into their hearts. If the reader does not at first feel that God is there or responding, the reader should check to see if his heart is open to recognize God's response. Praise provides that                                  |

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|    | Thus, the psalmist shows the reader how to begin the conversation from the place of lament (1-2) and how to take that conversation more directly to God through praise (22).   | opening of the heart and allows the reader to become aware of God's constant presence.  |
| 22 | The psalmist's decision to shift from lament to praise leads to a fuller passage of praise that actually answers the concerns of the lament (24-26).   | Praise of God brings and/or increases confidence, trust, assurance, peace, and a sense of well-being now and in the long run. Praise of God brings an awareness of His presence that transcends and gives new perspective to the immediate circumstances of lament. God's answer to a cry for help will often come through the act of praise. Praise increases hearing of God's answer and awareness of His presence. |
| 25 | The psalmist notes that God is the source of His praise (25). God makes the psalmist able to praise. Through this identification, the psalmist shows that God's response to his cries (1-2, 19-21) is at least partly that God prompts the psalmist to enter a time of praise.   | It's important to ask God not only for help in difficult circumstances, but also to ask God for help in being able to praise Him during difficult circumstances. The ability to praise does not come from a person's strength but rather from God's power. God only requires a person's obedience in choosing to give praise. God does the rest, and He aligns the person's heart up with that praise.                |
| 22 | The psalmist's shift to praise includes speaking God's name. This indicates that a key to this shift is that the psalmist is counting on and praising not just any god but a specific God. Before he gets to verse 22, the psalmist has already identified the God who he is calling on (1, 2, 8, 10, 19). In verses 3-5 he has described God as holy and as one who saved his fathers and in whom they trusted. This is also the God who has been with the psalmist all his life (9-10). Immediately after the turning point of verse 22 where he signifies the importance of the name of God, the psalmist further | The psalmist's ability to shift from lament to praise is due to the specific nature of the very specific God that the psalmist is addressing. The reader gets the idea that not just any god could cause this transformative type of shift.   |

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|           | <p>identifies Him as the one who Israel should fear and stand in awe of (23). He further identifies this God as the one who has dominion over all (27-28).</p>  |   |
| <p>22</p> | <p>The psalmist is going to tell others of God’s name before the whole congregation. This concept is repeated in verse 30 but on a grander and future scale. Through this echoed correlation, the reader can see that the turning from praise to lament is not just for the psalmist’s own plight or for a reader’s individual plight. This turning also affects the entire congregation (22), extends to the entire world (27-29), and also to future generations (30-31).</p>   | <p>When the individual can praise God during difficulties it affects the entire congregation and reaffirms God’s promises to His people. Corporate praise plays a significant role in helping people through times of lament and lining people’s hearts and minds up with God’s promises.</p>   |
| <p>22</p> | <p>The psalmist begins to praise God before the congregation. In the praise passage that follows, he exhorts the congregation to praise God because of His faithfulness and because He is worthy (23-26). It is significant that the psalmist’s personal plight has not been resolved. This is not a testimony, per se, of how God delivered the psalmist from a particular situation. However, the psalmist’s shift from lament to praise is a different kind of testimony, as God has made it possible for the psalmist to see God’s power and presence at work in all such situations of lament. God has brought peace to the psalmist’s heart, and that peace is itself a testimony of who God is, a testimony given before the congregation. This is one significance of the psalmist moving from particular (in lament) to generalization (in praise). Through this structure, the psalmist is able to demonstrate that God’s praiseworthiness, faithfulness, and</p> | <p>The reader doesn’t need to wait until a particular situation is resolved before offering a testimony of praise for how God has brought presence and peace in that situation. The lack of seeing a particular resolution does not indicate that God is not doing what He has promised or that His peace and presence are not immediately available.</p> |

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|  | <p>deliverance are not dependent on what a person sees in a particular situation, but rather these attributes and intervention of God are always present in all circumstances.</p> |  |
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**B. Analysis of Psalm 22 as a Whole**

- b. Describe the cycles of plight and theology articulated by the psalmist in vv. 1-21. c. How do verses 22-31 bring the psalm to a climax?**

| Verse | Observation  | Inference |
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| 1-5   | <p>The psalmist feels unheard by God and cannot find peace in his plight. He counters this with a theological remembrance of God’s deliverance of the people in past times.</p> <p>The psalmist is identifying himself with his fathers, and not just his alone, but specifically the fathers of his people (“our fathers”). In this regard, he is also placing himself within the community as he calls out to God, even though his cries to God in verse 1 are in first person.</p> <p>So in crying out, the psalmist uses his own voice in first person. But as he reflects on God’s past faithfulness, he places himself within a current community with an historical tradition and history of relationship with God.</p> |           |
| 4-5   | <p>The psalmist indicates what God’s faithfulness looks like historically, with the key words “didst deliver them,” “were saved,” and “were not disappointed.”</p>   |           |
| 3     | <p>The psalmist contrasts God’s holiness with his plight (“Yet thou art holy”).</p> <p>Partly this sentence indicates that God is still present despite the psalmist’s plight, and that the plight</p>   |           |

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|     | <p>has done nothing to detract or take away from God's attributes.</p> <p>Partly this sentence also indicates that God's holiness transcends the psalmist's plight. God is worthy of trust, expectation of deliverance, and ultimately (verse 22) praise, simply because He is holy.</p>   |  |
| 3-5 | <p>There is a specific sequence in these verses:</p> <p>The psalmist indicates that God's holiness and God's inhabitation of His people's praise was the basis for the fathers' ability to trust God.</p> <p>The psalmist structures this section in which a description of God's holiness and habitation in the praises of His people precedes deliverance and being saved.</p> <p>The psalmist also shows that the fathers' trust and crying out to God preceded deliverance, being saved, and not being disappointed.</p> | <p>The holy God's relationship with His people leads to deliverance and being saved. Praise of this holy God opens hearts to receive deliverance and being saved through faith and trust. The relationship between people and God is established by a holy God drawing near to live with His people and by the people crying out to Him with open hearts and being willing to praise Him for who He is. This dynamic relationship, based on who God is, His desire to dwell with His people, and the people's desire to call on Him, trust Him, and praise Him leads to deliverance and being saved.</p> |
| 7-8 | <p>People mock the psalmist's expectation that God will deliver him. The psalmist recalls one of the reasons for his expectation and faith: God has always been with him (9-10). The psalmist uses this theological reflection to reaffirm the foundation of his faith and to show that his expectation is not futile. In contrasting these two passages, the psalmist shows that what he knows of God's presence trumps the mocking words of people and even the brutality of his circumstances.</p>                        | <p>On any given day, a person could go in either direction of this contrast that is identified by the psalmist. It is vital to listen to truth instead of lies. Lies lead in the direction of despair. Truth leads toward peace.</p>   |
| 11  | <p>The psalmist notes in the face of opposition and mockery that he will not find help there, or anywhere apart from God. He acknowledges that God's presence is his only help.</p>  | <p>Expectation of God's deliverance does not require confirmation by sight, but rather by faith in God's presence and promises.</p>  |

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|              | <p>That is significant in the face of the contrast between verses 8 and 11. The mockers imply that God is not helping the psalmist. The psalmist asks God to come near because he has no other help. While he does not explicitly name God as his help in this verse, it is implied within the context of God’s constant presence (9-10) and the psalmist’s desire to have God near (11). God’s help is directly confirmed later in verse 19.</p>  |  |
| <p>14-15</p> | <p>The psalmist describes a plight that is terrible almost to the point of death. This sets up a significant contrast with the passage that follows, especially verses 20-21.</p> <p>This is perhaps the most extreme of the contrasts in the first main unit of the psalm. Not only does the psalmist describe the pit of despair (12-18), but also he contrasts it with his strongest theological response (20-21). Where the previous theological reflections were affirmations, this one is an actual response of calling on God for deliverance and salvation (20-21), with an implied expectation of confidence in God’s ability to do this.</p> <p>The psalmist’s shift to praise in verse 22 is both a product and confirmation of his confidence in God. This confidence of verses 20-22 is echoed in verses 24-26.</p> |  |
| <p>19</p>    | <p>Where the psalmist has previously lamented that God seems far off (1-2) or asks Him not to be far off (11), now he is specifically asking for God’s presence to move close to Him, and quickly (19), and for the purpose of helping the psalmist in the midst of such an extreme plight</p>   |  |

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|           | <p>(19).</p> <p>It is significant that the psalmist shifts from here into praise. The psalmist has already made the connection between God’s habitation/presence and praise (3). As the psalmist boldly asks for God to rush to be with him, he is also rushing to be with God through his praise. It also seems that God has empowered his ability to praise (25) because of the psalmist calling on God to come to him and deliver him (19-21).</p>             |   |
| <p>3</p>  | <p>The psalmist indicates that God not only inhabits the praise of Israel but is also specifically “enthroned” there (שב יושב means to dwell and to be enthroned). In the context of verses 27-31, in which the psalmist praises God’s dominion and reign, verse 3 takes on a significant meaning. The connection has to do with individuals and the corporate congregation of worshipers connecting themselves with God’s reign and dominion through praise.</p> | <p>God’s reign and dominion are absolute and forever. If people want to avail themselves to His reign, they can access this place through praise of God. Why is this significant? This psalm demonstrates and reminds that people might not always see evidence of God’s reign in the midst of their daily plights. They might have to call these things to remembrance, and that might bring some assurance. But God already reigns and His dominion is absolute and forever, whether people see it or not. To connect with the truth of God’s reign in the midst of daily struggles, people can access that truth through their praise. Praise is not just a reminder. It’s a direct access to God on His throne in His forever reign and dominion. Praise brings heaven to earth in any moment and any circumstance. This means wisdom, truth, peace, and the presence of God are brought into the situation that is causing lament.</p> |
| <p>31</p> | <p>It is significant that the climax includes a reference to deliverance. The psalmist has already developed this theme (4, 20), and the psalmist brings this theme into the climactic and final verse. From the psalmist’s</p>   | <p>God brings His holiness and His absolute reign to earth for the purpose of delivering His people.</p>  |

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|              | <p>description of God’s attributes, it would seem to be enough to praise God because He is holy (3) and because He reigns over all (28). But the psalmist is also showing that God’s reign includes a plan for deliverance that extends to all the generations. By including this in the climactic verse, the psalmist shows that the desire for deliverance of His people is also one of God’s attributes.</p>  |  |
| <p>28-29</p> | <p>The psalmist shows how God’s dominion sheds light on verses 7 and 15.</p> <p>God’s reign puts mockery (7) in a different perspective. The power of that mockery and of those harsh words is diminished, if not obliterated, in the face of God’s power. While the mocker’s words might seem to reign over the psalmist’s circumstances, the psalmist is showing here that God’s truth actually reigns.</p> <p>God’s reign also puts the psalmist’s helplessness into the right perspective (15). The psalmist cannot deliver himself; only God can do that (29). This frames the psalmist’s cries of verses 1, 2, 11, 20, 21. Where the psalmist seemed to think he was begging God for help, instead he was making himself available to God’s presence and power that could deliver him.</p> | <p>In light of God’s rule and dominion, the lies and harsh words spoken against people for the purpose of tearing people down do not have the power to reign over their lives unless the people give them that power.</p> <p>A heart cry expressing anguish to God does not separate someone from God and is not a sign of petulant begging. Rather, this type of anguished heart cry puts a person in the path to experience God’s deliverance and salvation.</p> |
| <p>31</p>    | <p>The psalmist shows how God’s deliverance extends from past (4) to present (20) to future (31). This verse is climactic in establishing that God’s deliverance is something that lasts. It is not temporary or subject to whim but rather is established by and associated with his forever reign</p>  | <p>God’s help is not meant to be a quick fix. It is meant to be a life change and an eternal change. God does not just deliver from one particular plight. He delivers from a state of perpetual and eternal plight.</p>   |

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|    | (27-31). This gives added meaning and significance to the psalmist's cry in verses 20-21. This is not a hollow cry but rather it is a cry founded in a God whose reign lasts forever. It is not temporary help but lasting help.  |   |
| 26 | The psalmist weaves the plight of the afflicted into the climax. This reinforces that his own plight, described in the first main unit, is representative of the plight of the people. He calls the people into this climactic section (22-23) and follows that immediately with praise of God's attentiveness toward the afflicted (24), and this is resolved with the blessings experienced by the afflicted in verse 26. The generalization of the praise section (22-31) is set in contrast with the particulars of the psalmist's plight (1-21). This gives the reader a bigger picture of who God is and what He intends, and this picture transcends the psalmist's description of his plight.         | Praise reminds of the truth and promises of God's heart and intended blessings for the afflicted, even in the midst of ongoing suffering. As God's plan for blessings and the suffering of the afflicted remain in tension, praise helps each person remember (for her own sake and for that of the community) that God's plan is not thwarted by momentary suffering. Praise reminds readers of the big picture of God's plans, so this focus is not lost during the depths of suffering. God's plan to deliver, save, restore, and bless continues and is not stopped by suffering. Praise is like getting glimpses of sunshine on a cloudy day and remembering that the sun is still there and has not stopped being what it is or doing what it does. |
| 26 | The psalmist introduces God's blessing for those who are afflicted, but this is only the first of three blessings developed in this verse. Each one leads increasingly to the climax. Not only are the temporary struggles of the afflicted taken care of. Beyond that, the people are invited to seek and praise God, which suggests that in seeking Him, they will discover a desire to praise Him (they will discover even more attributes and reasons for praise beyond their immediate perceived needs). Praise, as established earlier, also invites a relationship, and so does seeking God. This is an even greater and more lasting outcome than having immediate needs met. The psalmist goes on to | Praise leads to a deeper relationship with God and greater revelation and awareness of what God is doing in the midst of suffering. Praise allows the reader to respond to God in the circumstances, rather than reacting to the circumstances.   |

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|  | <p>declare a blessing that the afflicted seeker-praisers' hearts will "live for ever." That is likewise more climactic and longer-impacting (forever!) than having immediate needs met or receiving immediate relief from a particular plight. The generalization experienced within the climax of this psalm has much greater import than the particulars that led up to it (as substantial as those were).</p> <p>There is a paradigm shift at work here. The psalmist has moved from the lowest low (15) to an outcome of eternal relationship with God that far transcends those circumstances.</p> <p>In making this climactic transition, the psalmist does not belittle the circumstances of his plight. In fact, he has given more lines to the deepest area of his plight in verses 12-18 than to the earlier descriptions in verses 1-2 and 6-8. Clearly he has given weight to the afflictions that he and others have experienced.</p> <p>However, in the structure of blessings he develops in verse 26, it becomes clear that the resolution to his immediate plight is encompassed by something far greater. The reader can also see how the psalmist's cry for God's help led to a much greater awareness of what God's help looks like and of the importance in praising Him.</p> |  |
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**C. Psalter Context**

In my rapid survey of the Psalter, I noted predominant themes that were common among a large number of psalms. Psalm 22 contains many of those themes: praise, God's reign, God's faithfulness, adversity and evil, God hears, trust, and deliverance. Psalm 22 comes about midway through Book I of the Psalter. Most of the major focal points of Book I are reflected in Psalm 22: establishing and remembering that God is

faithful and trustworthy, His reign is righteous, He hears the cries of His people, and He delivers the righteous. The psalms immediately preceding Psalm 22 share a theme of staying on God's path and God's deliverance. Psalm 21 focuses on God blessing the kind and destroying his enemies. The transition afterward, to Psalm 23, is one of confidence and eternal trust in God, even in the face of enemies. The psalms immediately following these emphasize staying on God's path and seeking God as the source of strength. Thus the reader is introduced in this section to trusting in God's presence, even in the midst of adversity.

#### **D. Summary**

- At some point in the process of lament, a person needs to make an intentional decision to offer praise to God. Praise during lament is a sacrifice that shifts perspective. The conversation starts with lament, but lament leads to praise. At some point the person must intentionally make the choice to praise regardless of circumstances.
- If praise is where God lives, that would be the place to go to when God seems far away. The psalmist shows that his readers can go to that place simply by praising God. God has not left. His readers need to remember where He is and reorient themselves to that place through praise.
- God answers the cries of His people but the people also must respond and move toward Him to receive that answer into their hearts. If the reader does not at first feel that God is there or responding, the reader should check to see if his heart is open to recognize God's response. Praise provides that opening of the heart and allows the reader to become aware of God's constant presence.
- Praise of God brings and/or increases confidence, trust, assurance, peace, and a sense of well-being now and in the long run. Praise of God brings an awareness of His presence that transcends and gives new perspective to the immediate circumstances of lament. God's answer to a cry for help will often come through the act of praise. Praise increases hearing of God's answer and awareness of His presence.
- It's important to ask God not only for help in difficult circumstances, but also to ask God for help in being able to praise Him during difficult circumstances. The ability to praise does not come from a person's strength but rather from God's power. God only requires a person's obedience in choosing to give praise. God does the rest, and He aligns the person's heart with that praise.
- The psalmist's ability to shift from lament to praise is due to the specific nature of the very specific God that the psalmist is addressing. The reader gets the idea that not just any god could cause this transformative type of shift.
- When the individual can praise God during difficulties it affects the entire congregation and reaffirms God's promises to His people. Corporate praise plays a significant role in helping people through times of lament and lining people's hearts and minds up with God's promises.
- The reader doesn't need to wait until a particular situation is resolved before offering a testimony of praise for how God has brought presence and peace in that situation. The lack of seeing a particular resolution does not indicate that

God is not doing what He has promised or that His peace and presence are not immediately available.

- The holy God's relationship with His people leads to deliverance and being saved. Praise of this holy God opens hearts to receive deliverance and being saved through faith and trust. The relationship between people and God is established by a holy God drawing near to live with His people and by the people crying out to Him with open hearts and being willing to praise Him for who He is. This dynamic relationship, based on who God is, His desire to dwell with His people, and the people's desire to call on Him, trust Him, and praise Him leads to deliverance and being saved.
- On any given day, a person could go in either direction of this contrast that is identified by the psalmist. It is vital to listen to truth instead of lies. Lies lead in the direction of despair. Truth leads toward peace.
- Expectation of God's deliverance does not require confirmation by sight, but rather by faith in God's presence and promises.
- God's reign and dominion are absolute and forever. If people want to avail themselves to His reign, they can access this place through praise of God. Why is this significant? This psalm demonstrates and reminds that people might not always see evidence of God's reign in the midst of their daily plights. They might have to call these things to remembrance, and that might bring some assurance. But God already reigns and His dominion is absolute and forever, whether people see it or not. To connect with the truth of God's reign in the midst of daily struggles, people can access that truth through their praise. Praise is not just a reminder. It's a direct access to God on His throne in His forever reign and dominion. Praise brings heaven to earth in any moment and any circumstance. This means wisdom, truth, peace, and the presence of God are brought into the situation that is causing lament.
- God brings His holiness and His absolute reign to earth for the purpose of delivering His people.
- In light of God's rule and dominion, the lies and harsh words spoken against people for the purpose of tearing people down do not have the power to reign over their lives unless the people give them that power.
- A heart cry expressing anguish to God does not separate someone from God and is not a sign of petulant begging. Rather, this type of anguished heart cry puts a person in the path to experience God's deliverance and salvation.
- God's help is not meant to be a quick fix. It is meant to be a life change and an eternal change. God does not just deliver from one particular plight. He delivers from a state of perpetual and eternal plight.
- Praise reminds of the truth and promises of God's heart and intended blessings for the afflicted, even in the midst of ongoing suffering. As God's plan for blessings and the suffering of the afflicted remain in tension, praise helps each person remember (for her own sake and for that of the community) that God's plan is not thwarted by momentary suffering. Praise reminds readers of the big picture of God's plans, so this focus is not lost during the depths of suffering. God's plan to deliver, save, restore, and bless continues and is not stopped by suffering. Praise is like getting glimpses of sunshine on a cloudy day and

remembering that the sun is still there and has not stopped being what it is or doing what it does.

- Praise leads to a deeper relationship with God and greater revelation and awareness of what God is doing in the midst of suffering. Praise allows the reader to respond to God in the circumstances, rather than reacting to the circumstances.

## E. Background Insights

Psalm 22 would have been written for the worshiping community. The time of writing is not clear, but this community often faced adversity and uncertainty throughout its history. The psalm emphasizes the community's traditions and historical connections to their fathers' relationship with God (3-5, 23), as well as continuity into the future (30-31). This reminder of their foundations (including the survival of the community in times of past upheaval) and the declaration of continuity would have been reassuring during uncertain times. The psalm also declares God's rulership over all the nations of the earth (27-29). This declaration would both assuage the worshiping community in light of foreign invasions and upheaval, and would also remind this community that they were established as a light to the nations.

## F. Scholarly Interpreters

**Mays, James Luther. *Psalms. Interpretation*. Louisville: WJK, 1994. Kindle edition. Loc. 2313-2508.**

Mays characterizes the lament portion of the psalm as prayer (Loc. 2318), which I neglected to mention. Psalm 22 is therefore a combination of prayer and praise, and Mays emphasizes the importance of holding these two together. He notes that the unity of prayer and praise in this psalm combine suffering and celebration, which is experienced again in the New Testament through the death and resurrection of Christ (Loc. 2485-2486). By tying these together, Mays sees this psalm as an example of understanding the Lord's Supper as "a thanksgiving of the lowly" (Loc. 2508).

He explains that when Jesus prayed the first words of this psalm (intended to represent the psalm in its entirety), He was modeling for people how to pray for help and was joining the afflicted in their suffering (Loc. 2343-2345). By joining in this prayer from Psalm 22, Jesus was also giving people permission to tell God about their suffering, and that this is part of praying and living in faith (Loc. 2345). Mays notes how the characteristics of this psalm (prayer, focus on God, obedience, thanksgiving, and empathy) can be witnessed in the life of Jesus (Loc. 2512).

Mays also notes that this psalm is representative of messianic royalty and that this psalm "interprets Jesus' passion and resurrection" as a call for everyone in the world to believe that God reigns (Loc. 2498).

Several of my observations are confirmed by Mays, including how the praise section transcends the depths of the lament (Loc. 2349-2353). He also characterizes this psalm as a testimony, adding that the action and absence of God are held in tension within this testimony (Loc. 2372, 2392). Similarly, he notes the importance of the community foundation and history (Loc. 2385-2386), as well as the importance of the personal dimension of relationship with God (Loc. 2387-2390). Mays notes that the psalm provides a new perspective (Loc. 2484), just as I also noted.

Where I noted that the psalmist had given more lines to the worst of his plight (verses 12-18), Mays notes additionally a three-part repetition within this passage for emphasis (Loc. 2367).

While I did not see this as a typical thanksgiving-type psalm, Mays refers to this as a “service of thanksgiving.” He cites verse as God’s answer to the psalmist’s plight (Loc. 2432), whereas I did not see any clear resolution to the specific plight of the psalmist, but rather a general description of how God meets people in their place of suffering.

Where I noted how this psalm would have reminded the earliest readers of their role as a light to the nations, Mays takes this further in recognizing that this psalm calls for a recommitment of the faith community of Israel – recommitment of their relationship with God (Loc. 2442).

**Tostengard, Sheldon. “Psalm 22.” *Interpretation* 46 (1992): 167-170.**

Tostengard notes a tension within this psalm, as I did, but his focus is on the first main unit and its tension between prayer and remembrance (167). He notes that this tension resides in the “saving suffering” of Christ (167). Where I observed that the psalmist’s attention is on God’s presence in the midst of suffering, Tostengard takes this to a deeper dimension, describing God’s hiddenness behind a situation of struggle (167). He observes that “the hidden presence of God is actually God’s way of being with us when we are beset by difficulty” (168) and notes how this may confound a person’s theology.

Where I noted that the psalmist had painted a bleak picture (12-18), Tostengard confirms this (168). Where I contrasted that with the picture of praise that follows it, Tostengard contrasts it with the remembrances in the first main unit (168), and notes how the psalmist’s belief is drawn from remembrance of God’s faithfulness. It is interesting that Tostengard uses the same imagery I used in comparing God’s presence in suffering to the sun behind the clouds (169). Here he makes an important distinction between denial of circumstance and faith within the “full perception” of circumstances (169).

Tostengard confirms my observation that the remembrances are both on a personal and corporate level. He notes that the combination of the two is what gives the psalmist faith (169). He also characterizes this psalm as “private lament” and “corporate cry to God for help” (170).

Where I observed that this does not seem to be a typical thanksgiving psalm, Tostengard raises that very question: has the deliverance taken place yet or not? (170) Helpfully he notes that both the breadth and depth of suffering portrayed in the psalm – and the references to this psalm in the New Testament narratives about Christ's passion – show readers both the depths to which Christ suffered (on our account) and the breadth to which He identifies and is present with each person in her unique situations of suffering (170).

**Davis, Ellen F. “Exploding the Limits: Form and Function in Psalm 22.” *JSOT* 53 (1992): 93-105.**

Davis discussing the disruptive nature of poetic language (95), which confounds expectations and makes the psalm relevant for prayer in each new generation (96). Where I noted the personal and corporate nature of this psalm, Davis notes that these two dimensions allow psalms like this one to serve as a prayer resource through the generations (93).

Where I attempted to identify the psalm as a lament with elements of praise, Davis more specifically describes it as “an individual lament whose theme is praise” (96). Her description of the psalm's subject as “the possibility, efficacy and necessity of giving praise to God *in extremis*” (96) confirms my observation of the important connection where lament can and must lead to praise, and is even answered in praise. She also confirms my observation that the praise arises specifically (at least in part) out of the lament (100).

Davis notes the imperatives in verses 20-22 (90), which I described as the psalmist's change to a tone of confidence. She notes that the verbs in these verses are in perfect aspect, indicating that the deliverance has occurred or is certain to occur. This helps with my understanding of whether or not the psalmist's cries for help have been answered as he moves into the praise section of the psalm. Whether or not they are literally answered, his use of perfect verbs seems to indicate his certainty that this is done. This is particularly significant when considering how people navigate the positional completion of Christ's work with the reality that the kingdom has not yet fully arrived. Davis notes that “rescue is a certainty” (90) and that is powerful imagery to work with in understanding this psalm and its implications for suffering within the “not yet fully here” kingdom of God.

Regarding Jesus' use of this psalm's opening line, Davis connect His cry with the path walked by the preceding “generations of Israelites who suffered in faith” (104). In this regard, she notes the power of poetry to transform perceptions (which also confirms one of my observations), showing how the “power of faithful praise” can open a person and community to a “previously unimaginable future” (104). This allows for an expansion of faith beyond what the reader knows God has done in the past to what God will do in the midst of today's and future suffering. This seems to be what Davis describes as “the place where, at the extreme point of suffering, our lives are brought into passionate

intersection with God's" (105). Davis suggests that this psalm calls for the faith community to "make a place in public life for the experience of faithful suffering" (104).

### III. Synthesis of Interpretation

- This psalm is both a personal and public lament. It is a prayer resource for the generations. Praise is a significant part of prayer, and so is lament. Lament that leads into praise is an intentional sacrifice that shifts perspective. Praise of God brings and increases confidence, trust, assurance, peace, and a sense of well-being, now and in the long run. Praise of God brings an awareness of His presence that transcends and gives new perspective to the immediate circumstances of lament.
- God is enthroned in the praises of His people. When God seems far away, praise will reorient a person to God's constant presence and will help that person remain aware of His presence. God answers the cries of His people, but the people also must respond and move toward God to receive His answers in their hearts. Lament and praise open a person's heart to God's presence and to His response. Praise increases hearing and awareness of God.
- A heart cry expressing anguish to God does not separate someone from God and is not a sign of petulant begging. Rather, this type of anguished heart cry puts a person in the path to experience God's deliverance and salvation. In His crucifixion, Jesus models for readers a prayer of suffering. Psalm 22 reminds readers of the depth and breadth to which Jesus identifies with each person in her suffering. Suffering is an important part (or needs to be) of our community faith life. Prayer and praise belong together, much as suffering and celebration in Christ belong together. This gives the reader a vision of the Eucharist as the "thanksgiving of the lowly" (Mays, Loc. 2508).
- It is important to ask God not only for help in difficult circumstances, but also to ask God for help in being able to praise Him during difficult circumstances. The ability to praise does not come from a person's strength but rather from God's power. God only requires a person's obedience in choosing to give praise. God does the rest, and He realigns and transforms the person's heart with that praise. When the individual can praise God during difficult times, this act of praise affects the entire community of faith and reaffirms God's promises to His people. Corporate praise plays a significant role in helping people through times of lament and realigning people's hearts and minds with God's presence and promises.
- A person does not need to wait until a particular situation is resolved before offering a testimony of praise for how God has brought presence and peace into that situation. The lack of seeing a particular resolution does not indicate that God is not doing what He has promised or that His peace and presence are not immediately available. Expectation of God's deliverance does not require confirmation by sight, but rather by faith in God's presence and promises. This psalm invites readers not only to discover God's presence in suffering, but also His hiddenness.

- Lament and praise lead to a deeper relationship with God and greater revelation and awareness of what God is doing in the midst of suffering. Lament and praise allow a person to respond to God in the circumstances, rather than reacting to the circumstances. Praise reminds a person of the truth and promises of God's heart and intended blessings for the afflicted, even in the midst of ongoing suffering. As tension remains between God's plan for blessings and the suffering of the afflicted, praise helps each person remember (for her own sake and for that of the community) that God's plan is not thwarted by momentary suffering. Praise reminds readers of the big picture of God's plans, so this focus is not lost during the depths of suffering. God's plan to deliver, save, restore, and bless continues and is not stopped by suffering. Lament that leads to praise is like getting glimpses of sunshine on a cloudy day and remembering that the sun is still there and has not stopped being what it is or doing what it does. This psalm reminds readers that Jesus' work is positionally accomplished, even though His kingdom is not yet fully manifested. The psalmist reminds readers that "rescue is a certainty" (Davis, 90). Meanwhile, Christ models for the reader how to pray through her lament.
- On any given day, a person could go in either direction: despair or peace. It is vital to listen to truth instead of lies. Lies lead in the direction of despair. Truth leads toward peace. When despair is turned into a prayer of lament, the person is headed toward praise and peace by God's own help. In light of God's rule and dominion, the lies and harsh words spoken against people for the purpose of tearing people down do not have the power to reign over their lives unless the people give them that power.
- God's reign and dominion are absolute and forever. If people want to avail themselves to His reign, they can access this place through praise of God. Why is this significant? This psalm demonstrates and reminds that people might not always see evidence of God's reign in the midst of their daily plights. They might have to call these things to remembrance, and that might bring some assurance. But God already reigns and His dominion is absolute and forever, whether people see it or not. God brings His holiness and His absolute reign to earth for the purpose of delivering His people. To connect with the truth of God's reign in the midst of daily struggles, people can access that truth through their praise. Praise is not just a reminder. It is a direct access to God on His throne in His forever reign and dominion. Praise brings heaven to earth in any moment and any circumstance. This means wisdom, truth, peace, and the presence of God are brought into the situation that is causing lament.
- This psalm calls for a recommitment in relationship to God. God's help is not meant to be a quick fix. It is meant to be a life change and an eternal change. God does not just deliver from one particular plight. He delivers from a state of perpetual and eternal plight. The holy God's relationship with His people leads to deliverance and salvation. Praise of this holy God opens hearts to receive deliverance and salvation through faith and trust. The relationship between people and God is established by a holy God drawing near to live with His people and by the people crying out to Him with open hearts and being willing to praise Him for who He is. This dynamic relationship, based on who God is, His desire to

dwell with His people, and the people's desire to call on Him, trust Him, and praise Him leads to deliverance and salvation. Lament and praise have the power to transform a person's perceptions, so that person can see the bigger picture of her suffering, God's presence and hiddenness within it, and what He is doing to bring deliverance and salvation in the world. The poetry of this psalm also helps people to see with a new perspective in each new generation.

## IV. Evaluation

### 1. Truth Statement

- Lament and praise lead to a deeper relationship with God and greater revelation and awareness of what God is doing in the midst of suffering. As tension remains between God's plan for blessings and the suffering of the afflicted, praise helps each person remember (for her own sake and for that of the community) that God's plan is not thwarted by momentary suffering. Lament that leads to praise is like getting glimpses of sunshine on a cloudy day and remembering that the sun is still there. Psalm 22 reminds New Testament readers that God's redemption work is positionally accomplished, even though His kingdom is not yet fully manifested. Meanwhile, Christ models for the reader how to pray through her lament.
- A heart cry expressing anguish to God does not separate someone from God and is not a sign of petulant begging. Rather, this type of anguished heart cry puts a person in the path to experience God's deliverance and salvation. In His crucifixion, Jesus models for readers a prayer of suffering by quoting from Psalm 22. This psalm reminds New Testament readers of the depth and breadth to which Jesus identifies with each person in her suffering. Suffering is an important part (or needs to be) of our community faith life. Prayer and praise belong together, much as suffering and celebration in Christ belong together.

### 2. Immediate Context

This psalm was directed toward the faith community. It was a call for thanksgiving for God's faithfulness and a call to recommit to God despite present afflictions. The text assumes that the audience has suffered and possibly wonders where God is in the midst of suffering. The community as whole, and individuals within the community, probably have witnessed unresolved injustices on many levels, from international warfare to abuses within society to tragic illnesses and premature death.

The psalmist identifies with the suffering of this audience, gives them a way to pray, praise, and reconnect with God during their times of affliction, reminds them of God's past faithfulness and His trustworthiness in the present, and gives assurance of His future faithfulness. I do not see any evidence that would limit the application of this psalm. The praise section has a global and future focus, and the first words of this psalm are quoted directly in the New Testament.

### **3. Canon**

#### **Psalter**

The Psalter itself, as a whole book, combines the themes of lament and praise, and it also demonstrates how the laments earlier in the book lead to the praise section at the end of the book. Themes of God's presence, faithfulness, trustworthiness, care for the afflicted, and promise of deliverance resonate throughout the Psalter.

Psalm 23:4-5, which follows right after Psalm 22, is a reminder of God's presence and attentiveness even in the face of danger and opposition.

Psalm 42:5 models a tension between lament and praise similar to that of Psalm 22. The psalmist is downcast but exhorts himself to praise God – not only to praise Him, but also to find hope in His presence.

Psalm 71:23 models praise in response to God's redemption. The psalmist here does not indicate a reprieve from difficulties. The verses leading up to this in some ways mirror the tension between plight and trust in Psalm 22. The key for the psalmist here is not the alleviation of current problems. Rather, it is God's redemption of the soul. This points to God's bigger picture of what He is doing to bring redemption in the midst of a world that suffers.

#### **Old Testament**

Deuteronomy 31:6 reminds the reader of God's constant presence, no matter what circumstances might prompt fear or struggle. Unlike historical verses where the reader can see how God has delivered His people from a particular situation, this verse from Deuteronomy is similar to Psalm 22 in seeking God's presence (and trusting Him) during an unresolved crisis.

Isaiah is filled with imagery depicting God's restoration of His people who have suffered. Verse 43:2 captures this imagery while also reminding the reader that God is present to help through all times of suffering. This and other passages from Isaiah are also a prophetic reminder that God's restoration plan will be fulfilled, regardless of how circumstances appear in the present.

#### **New Testament**

The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) would seem to be Jesus' answer to the lament of Psalm 22. In the Beatitudes, Jesus models how to turn lament into praise. His words remind the reader that there is more going on in God's kingdom than meets the eye, and that earthly afflictions do not have the last word.

In Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34, Jesus models the psalmist's prayer of lament in Psalm 22 by reciting verse 1. Jesus demonstrates that He identifies with those who are suffering and teaches them by example how to pray through their times of suffering. The significance of His crucifixion and the resurrection to follow adds a new depth to this prayer, and shows the reader how to combine lament with praise.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 – In Paul's affliction, God shows him that He is not only present, but that He is also working His own strength through that affliction. This echoes the understanding in the praise section of Psalm 22 that God is working greater things in the world than what can be seen through a person's focus on momentary affliction. This perspective is echoed by Paul earlier in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18. In 1 Corinthians 13:12, Paul also reminds the reader that a person's perspective is limited in the present and sees only in part the things of God.

Hebrews 2:18, 4:15, 13:15 – These verses remind the reader that Jesus identifies with her in her suffering and does not dismiss her struggles. In light of this suffering, verse 13:15 calls for a sacrifice of praise and specifically giving thanks to the name of God, which is similar to the transition point of Psalm 22:22. Philippians 3:10 likewise reminds the reader of the importance of the fellowship of the suffering of Christ. The idea that suffering needs to be included in the corporate experience of the faith community is attested by that verse.

Revelation 21, especially verse 4, reminds the reader that suffering is temporary and that during times of suffering, God is doing a much bigger work with eternal impact. Praise during lament helps a person to focus on the truth of Revelation 21, even in the midst of present suffering.

#### **4. Evaluative Synthesis**

- Lament and praise lead to a deeper relationship with God and greater revelation and awareness of what God is doing in the midst of suffering. As tension remains between God's ultimate redemption and restoration plan and the present suffering of the afflicted, praise helps each person remember (for her own sake and for that of the community) that God's plan is not thwarted by momentary suffering. There is more going on in God's kingdom than meets the eye, and earthly afflictions do not have the last word.
- Lament that leads to praise is like getting glimpses of sunshine on a cloudy day and remembering that the sun is still there. Psalm 22 reminds New Testament readers that God's redemption work is positionally accomplished through Christ, even though His kingdom is not yet fully manifested. Praise opens the reader's heart to receive insights of what God is doing. Meanwhile, Christ models for the reader how to pray through times of lament.
- A heart cry expressing anguish to God does not separate a person from God and is not a sign of petulant begging. Rather, this type of anguished heart cry puts a person in the path to experience God's deliverance and salvation. In His crucifixion, Jesus models for readers a prayer of suffering by quoting from Psalm

22. This psalm reminds New Testament readers of the depth and breadth to which Jesus identifies with each person in her suffering. Suffering is an important part (or needs to be) of our community faith life. In light of the resurrection, Jesus's prayer of lament leads to praise and celebration. Lament and praise belong together, much as suffering and celebration in Christ belong together. As these two aspects of prayer come together, the reader is reminded of the impact of Christ's resurrection in the midst of current suffering.

## **V. Application/Appropriations**

### **Mission**

Psalm 22 encourages followers of Christ to stay focused on God's big-picture mission in the world: deliverance, redemption, salvation, and restoration. While the pain of temporary afflictions are not to be downplayed or disregarded, it is vital for Christ's followers to remember that God is carrying out a solution to a much bigger affliction: the affliction of eternal separation from Him. Temporary struggles must be seen in that light and addressed by seeking His presence more deeply, just as Psalm 22 suggests.

For people who are not yet followers of Christ, the world they are being called to help create is one that first brings compassion, comfort, and aid in the midst of worldly suffering. These individuals should note that this comfort and temporary provision come from an abundance of hope in the bigger picture of what God is doing in the world. The bigger world they are being called to help create is one in which the presence of God is the most important provision. People cannot meet every human need, but they can model for others how to seek God's presence, as in Psalm 22. That is the greatest gift a person can offer and it is how all of those other needs will be met by God's presence.

### **Community**

The community of Christ's followers ideally does not live by denying the presence of suffering. Rather, the community needs to recognize the prevalence of suffering and allow people to express their sorrows publicly without shame. This community should not belittle a person's suffering but rather be present, in love, during those difficult and painful times. This is a community that should teach people how to pray in lament, as well as encourage corporate prayers that combine praise with lament. This community needs to learn how to praise God from a place of pain, rather than from a whitewashed place of denial.

For people who are not yet followers of Christ, they are being invited to join a community that laughs and cries together. The people in this community are willing to walk with one another in their pain. At the same time, they can genuinely encourage each other to remember what God is doing in their midst, and to remind each other to seek His presence. This is a community that should know how to discern the timing of each of these aspects of prayer: lament and praise. They rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15).

## **Holiness**

Psalm 22 reminds followers of Christ that when they praise God during times of lament, they are opening their hearts to His transforming power and getting a deeper glimpse of His presence in their midst. This encounter at a deep level of pain and praise should have a heart-change impact on each person. The change of perspective does not deny the struggles that have led to the lament. Rather, it changes the person into someone who can “be” in God’s presence no matter what is going on around that person.

For those who are not followers of Christ, the truths of Psalm 22 invite them to learn how to live in God’s presence and peace, no matter what terrible things are happening. This is true whether or not the difficult situation is resolved. Sometimes a problem might be solved, simply because with the peace of God’s presence, His wisdom and solutions might become clear. At other times, the situation might not change, but God’s peace will be more than enough and will bring the right focus and perspective. These individuals will be able to help others by learning to live in that place of peace, even as they were first helped by people who reached out to them and modeled how to live in the peace of God.

## **Jail Ministry Context**

The women at the jail tend to live in extremes. The tensions between lament and praise that the psalmist holds out to his readers are not something they are used to. They tend to fall toward the extreme of victimization or toward the other extreme of denial. On any given evening in the jail, we talk with women who are stuck in fits of woe that they can’t see past. And we talk with women who keep reciting scripture and praising God without acknowledging the reality of their struggles. They simply want to push reality into a box, shut the lid, and praise God from a place of denial. Neither of these extremes is healthy or practical. These extremes keep the women locked in the enemy’s grip and unable to access the plans God has for them.

I am excited at all the ways Psalm 22 can help them learn how to step out of this trap and into God’s presence. The psalm can teach them how to express genuine lament, focused on God rather than an inwardly focused “woe is me,” and it can teach them how to turn that lament into genuine praise, from a place of pain rather than denial. I love the idea that we can incorporate the Beatitudes into this lesson, as well as Jesus’s words as He spoke from Psalm 22:1, in light of His death and resurrection.

### **a. Missional Insight**

The women in the jail will need to embrace the reality that God’s kingdom right now includes suffering and redemption. They will need to understand that God is working in their lives and in the world all the time, no matter what difficulties they are experiencing. And God is calling them to step into His presence, so they can share that peace with others.

At the same time, they also need to understand that Jesus is completely with them in every aspect of their pain; that there is nothing they have or ever will experience that He has not also experienced; that He identifies with them in their deepest sorrows and struggles. Their invitation will be to let Jesus show them, through the scriptures and through prayer, how to express their hearts to God in lament, and how to then turn that into genuine praise.

I believe a re-visit to the story of Christ's death and resurrection will help them (re)discover a real foundation for their lament and their praise. I am excited to see what God shows them and does in their hearts during this time of immersing themselves in His Word and in the story of the crucifixion and resurrection.

### **b. Attitudinal Alignment**

Psalm 22 invites the women in the jail to experience a realignment of their attitudes. On the one hand, this psalm gives them permission to express their pain to God. At the same time, they need to realize that the purpose in doing so is not to sink further into their sense of victimization (that's the enemy's goal), but rather to seek God's presence in their lives and circumstances, so He can transform their perspectives.

Their prayers of lament and praise do not belittle their experiences of suffering, but rather allow them to see that suffering from a new place: from a kingdom perspective. I think it will be important for them to learn how to bring their prayers of lament into their community of faith that they have in the jail church; to share these together; to bring compassion, comfort, and hope to each other; and then to praise God together and commit to helping each other stay focused on the truth of God's big plan.

### **c. Plan of Implementation**

There are several directions in which we can take this Psalm 22 experience, and the Holy Spirit will lead us. I will have two evenings, two weeks apart, to work with this psalm, so it might be possible to work in all of these approaches as the Spirit leads.

One would be for the women to focus on the Beatitudes: which one(s) do they most relate to and what does Jesus say to them through those scriptures? How do His words apply specifically to their circumstances? This will teach them the lament side as well as the praise and perspective side, at a personal level.

Another would be for them to learn to pray in lament and praise along with the story of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.

They could also create a "public lament" that includes all of their contributions, and we could write this out as one corporate prayer, so they can pray it together. This activity would also include their sharing of praises to God – from their places of pain – and those would also be written out for a corporate time of thanksgiving. We would talk

about the importance of sharing in each other's pain and joy, and this activity would give them an opportunity to do both of those.

In whatever way(s) the lessons of Psalm 22 can be brought to these women, I have hope that God will speak through the scriptures and lead them out of victimization and denial and into His amazing presence.