

*Jacob's Well*

**Lesson Title:** Themes in the Psalms—Psalms of Hope



**Key Concept:** The Psalms provide an honest reflection of our human nature and the nature of God. Psalms of hope demonstrate the proper perspective towards problems in our lives.



**Scriptures:**

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.  
(Psalm 23:4 *New Living Translation*)

Now I will triumph over my enemies who surround me. I will offer sacrifices in his dwelling place and shout for joy. I will sing praises to the Lord.  
(Psalm 27:6 *New Living Translation*)

**Context Scriptures:** Psalm 3; Psalm 23; Psalm 27; Psalm 91; Psalm 118



**Lesson Thoughts:**

We humans are simple creatures. We like absolutes: things are good, or they're bad. This perspective is helpful; it lets us get through life without focusing on tiny details that don't matter. Sometimes, though, this simplicity can trip us up. Our reaction when we spot danger is often to assume that the danger is all there is. Alternatively, we pretend the danger isn't there, and act like nothing is happening.

The psalms, in particular psalms of hope, don't operate this way. We act like they operate this way: we focus on either "The Lord is my shepherd" (Psalm 23:1) or "false witnesses are risen up against me" (Psalm 27:12). The shepherd and the false witnesses are unrelated, in different psalms. But within those same psalms are found "I walk through the valley of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23:4) and "the Lord is my light and my salvation" (Psalm 27:1).

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How do these opposite thoughts coexist? How is the Lord my light while enemies come against me? How am I going through death while God leads me? The answer is that our perspective shapes our response. The psalmists faced deadly circumstances, but that never stopped God from being who he is, in all his power and glory. This gave the psalmists a new perspective. Psalm 27 describes being “surrounded” by enemies, but that is not the psalmist’s focus. He sees the troubles and acknowledges them, but the troubles aren’t the priority.

Both our instinctive reactions to danger are wrong and ignore the truth, which is in complete opposition to the nature of God *as* truth. When we ignore danger and pain, we only lie to ourselves about the truth. But when we focus only on the danger and pain, we ignore the truth, because God is greater than our dangers. The psalms demonstrate how to balance these two stances. We look at the troubles we face, because they’re all we can actually see. But we look at them through the lens of God’s power.

Psalms of hope are neither psalms of praise nor psalms of sorrow. They are psalms that acknowledge the present truth, but look for something greater to come. They look at earthly problems from a heavenly perspective. And when we do the same thing, something changes. We can say “though a mighty army surrounds me, my heart will not be afraid. Even if I am attacked, I will remain confident” (Psalm 27:3). We can have hope, or, put differently, we can have faith.

**Discussion Questions:**

- 1) Why do we at times ignore God’s presence and power when troubles come?
- 2) Why do we at times act like troubles and difficulties don’t really exist, or aren’t really a problem?
- 3) What does it mean to see troubles, but focus on God? How can you do this?
- 4) How are our future actions affected when God answers our prayers immediately, when he delays, or when he doesn’t seem to answer at all?
- 5) Are hope and faith the same? How are they different? How are they similar?

**Next Lesson:** Jesus in the Psalms

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**Notes and Reflections**

- 1) Read all of Psalm 23 and Psalm 27, and look for both the problems and the hope. Don't ignore either one, but consider how they relate to each other, and how they both can fit as part of the same psalm.
- 2) Do you have to know what God will do in order for you to have hope? Is it possible to have hope even after God hasn't done what you wanted? If this is possible, how?
- 3) For a New Testament example of hope, read Acts 5:40–41. How would you respond to being flogged? How could the apostles be so joyful?

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**Notes and Reflections, cont.**