

Adult Teaching Resources

February 6, 2022



Season of Epiphany

In Christ We Have ...

Psalm 138—“Amazing Care”

1 Corinthians 15:12-20—“Amazing Hope”

1 Corinthians 15:35-50 (RCL 15:35-38, 42-50)—“Amazing Thoughts”

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2—“Amazing Growth”

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“Amazing Care”

Psalm 138

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Key Verse

The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me;
your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.
Do not forsake the work of your hands

Opening

After everyone arrives, keep your group together in the large group. Ask everyone to consider the following scenarios and then ask them to choose whether they would deal with that scenario with a “glass half-full” attitude or a “glass half-empty” attitude. Please create other scenarios that speak directly to your class.

You face a “milestone” birthday.
It’s time for a different car.
The local election is next week.
Your extended family is gathering for their annual get-together.
You’ve been invited to dinner with a group of friends.
You’re presented with a new business opportunity/job offer.

Is your glass half-full or half empty as you face each situation? Why is that?
What determines the attitude you take?
Have you ever switched your attitude in the middle of the situation? What caused that to happen?
When have you been at the end of a “glass half-empty” situation and been truly thankful for what you experienced?

Reading the Bible

With what does the psalmist give thanks? (with the whole heart) How does the psalmist do this? (sings praise)

What does the psalmist do to show thanks for God’s steadfast love and faithfulness? (bows down toward the holy temple)

When did God answer the psalmist? (when the psalmist called God’s name) What did God do as an answer? (increased the psalmist’s strength of soul)

Who else shall praise God? (all the kings of the earth) Why shall they praise God? (for they have heard the words of God’s mouth)

Reading the Bible *continued*

How will the kings of the earth praise God? (they shall sing of the ways of the Lord)

Who does the Lord regard? (the lowly) Who does God perceive from far away? (the haughty)

What does God do for the psalmist when he walks in the midst of trouble? (God preserves him against the wrath of his enemies)

How does God do that? (God stretches out God's hand, and the right hand delivers him)

What will God do for the psalmist? (God will fulfill his purpose for the psalmist)

What endures forever? (God's steadfast love)

Making Connections

What are your favorite hymn lyrics? (Not the tune, but the words.) What is it about those words that speak to you in a special way? Have you ever heard a sermon that could have been taken from that hymn? What do you remember about that sermon?

What is your favorite hymn or prayer for a gathered group to sing or recite? What is it about that hymn or prayer that works so well in a group setting?

Our Lesson Writer says, "To praise God with one's whole heart was to do so with one's full being, thinking, love, and loyalty." What does "praising God with the whole heart" mean to you? What does that look like when you're alone? What does that look like in corporate worship?

What are the other "gods" in your world? What role do they play in your life? How often do those gods get in the way of your allegiance to God? How often does God take precedence over the other gods in your life?

When have you faced trials or challenges but found strength in God? What did you face? When did you turn to God? How did God help you?

Our Lesson Writer says, "Enamored by memories of how God had helped him, the psalmist expressed confidence—or hope—that God's reputation would spread throughout the known world..." What is your hope for God's reputation and the world? What are you doing about that? What is your church doing about that?

What role do you think God should have when it comes to national and international leaders? What can you point to as a good example of God's presence? What can you point to as a bad example of God's presence?

What does verse 6 mean to you, "For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away"?

What has been your experience with Liberation Theology? How does God work for those less fortunate and for those who have less than others?

Making Connections *continued*

How do you see God working in your life right now? How do you respond to God's continued presence in your life?

When are you certain of God's presence and work in your life? When do you have some doubt and uncertainty of God's presence and work in your life?

So What?

Remaining in the large group, share these words from our Lesson Writer, "perhaps God will remind us that there are others more unfortunate than us: perhaps we can be the means of God's blessing by reaching out our own hands to uplift others who may have given up hope, and who need the touch of hope."

Ask these questions for conversation and discussion:

Who in our church needs the gift of hope? How can we be the means of God's blessing for them?

Who in our community needs the gift of hope? How can we be the means of God's blessing for them?

Who in our world needs the gift of hope? How can we be the means of God's blessing for them?

Spends time talking and brainstorming about who needs hope and the possible ways your group can provide that hope.

Then, make a specific plan to do something to provide the hope others need.

What will you/your class do to provide hope for others?

What tangible items will be needed? How will you get those items?

How will you deliver or distribute the items?

What kind of on-going support will you provide?

Once you have a plan in place, pray for God's guidance and make a plan to make your plan happen.

The Challenge

This week, do your role in making your group's plan work. Pray daily for the work your group will do and when called on to step up and do the work, do it.

Prayer

Loving God, we give you thanks for all you have done and continue to do in our lives. We are blessed beyond words with your love and grace in our lives. You give us more than what we need. Open our eyes to those around us who need to know of the hope found in you. Help us to take action and be your hands and feet. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

A brief detour—Our series of studies from 1-2 Corinthians is interrupted this week by a text from the psalms. As noted previously, the reason is that the Epistle text for the day, 1 Corinthians 15:1-12, is also a frequent Easter text, which we studied last April. Rather than repeating a text so quickly, we will divert to the Psalms for one week. If you prefer to study 1 Corinthians 15 this week, the lesson is still available to subscribers through the online resources at GoodFaithMedia.org.

Where and when?—We can't be sure when or where this psalm was written. Like many other psalms, including the next seven in a row (through Psalm 145), it has a superscript attributing it to David. As we have noted before, “*leDawid*” may mean “to” or “for” David as well as “by” David. The attribution, however, suggests that the editor who added the superscription probably imagined that David wrote it following a time of personal illness or trial, probably in Jerusalem.

Others posit that the psalm is more communal than individual, proposing that it could have arisen during the postexilic period as a litany praising God for the exiles' return and expressing trust for better days.

Whole-hearted—The psalmist's desire to praise “with all my heart” is reminiscent of the command in Deut. 6:5 to “love Yahweh your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” By New Testament times, however, the Jews had been so influenced by Hellenistic thought—which shifted intellectual processes from the heart to the mind—that they added “and with all your mind,” as in Matt. 22:37, Mark 12:30, and Luke 10:27.

For the psalmist, it was all there in the word “heart.”

Gods in the Psalms—The reference to “the gods” in v. 1 is not the only place such terminology appears in the Old Testament. Neither is it the only psalm that speaks of other gods: Psalm 86:8 declares “There is none like you among the gods, O LORD, nor are there any works like yours” (see also Pss. 82:1, 6; 97:7).

Bowing down—While the NRSV, NET, and NIV11 have “bow down” and MSG has “kneel,” the word *ʾeshtahevōt* is an intensive form of a verb meaning “to prostrate oneself.” The psalmist wasn't just bowing his head, bending at the waist, or going to his knees: he speaks of prostrating himself before God in abject surrender.

A tricky translation—In translating the latter half of v. 2, scholars have often suggested emendations to the text, including a small change to make “name” mean “heavens,” suggesting that God's word is exalted above the heavens. Perhaps the best way to make sense of it is to take “name” in the sense of “fame” or “reputation,” and “word” in the sense of

Digging Deeper *continued*

“promise” (which it often has. This results in something like “you have made your promises greater than your reputation.” The TOB (*Traduction œcuménique de la Bible*), a French ecumenical translation, renders it nicely as “you have made promises that are greater than even your name.”

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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Does this psalm sound familiar?

Some scholars perceive several similarities between Psalm 138 and the “Song of Moses,” an early hymn of praise embedded in the story of the Exodus, reportedly sung by Moses and the Israelites after the crossing of the sea (Exodus 15:1-18).

In verse 1, for example, the psalmist lauds Yahweh, saying “I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart, before the gods I sing your praise.” In the Song of Moses, the first 10 verses praise God for deliverance at the sea, then v. 11 asks “Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods?”

The holy sanctuary was an important element in both Psalm 138 and the “Song of Moses.” In verse 2, the psalmist locates his prayer by declaring “I bow down toward your holy temple” as the place where Yahweh would be worshiped. The Song of Moses is imagined to have been celebrated long before Israel had a temple, yet Exod. 15:17 betrays its later date (or the possibility that it was a later addition) by speaking to the establishment of the temple: “You brought them in and planted them on the mountain of your own possession, the place, O LORD, that you made your abode, the sanctuary, O LORD, that your hands have established.”

Both songs likewise celebrate the powerful deliverance of God’s hand, particularly God’s right hand, a common symbol of mastery. The psalmist declares “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me” (v. 7). The reference recalls a similar theme from the Song of Moses: “Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power—your right hand, O LORD, shattered the enemy” (Exod. 15:6).

Both poets also think of themselves and their people as the work of God’s hands. In his closing verse, the psalmist prayed “The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.” The author of the Song of Moses clearly saw Israel and its deliverance as the work of God’s hands (v. 6), and spoke likewise of “the sanctuary, O LORD, that your hands have established” (Exod. 15:17).

We have no evidence that the author of Psalm 138 had the Song of Moses in mind when he wrote this poem, but he was clearly familiar with the theme of deliverance, the importance of the temple, and the anthropomorphic motif of God’s powerful hand that was responsible for both creating and delivering the people.

[Note: The potential similarities between Psalm 139 and Exod. 15:1-18 came to my attention through Larry Lyke’s contribution to a study of this lectionary text in *Feasting on the Word, Year C*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), vol. 1 of Accordance electronic ed., paragraph 3695.]