

# Youth 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

## YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Robert Tackett-Evans

This youth 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.

### Gathering

Take a few moments before beginning today’s lesson and allow everyone to share about their experience with last week’s challenge.

### Opening Exercise

As you begin today’s lesson, show the YouTube clip “All Alone in the World” from *Mr. Magoo’s Christmas Carol*. The clip can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7qOFB4IXA8>

If you are unable to show the clip, you can describe it to the best of your ability. After watching the clip, lead a discussion by asking questions like the following:

- Mr. Magoo (as Ebenezer Scrooge in this episode) sees himself as a young boy. What stands out to you about his childhood in this clip?
- The clip doesn’t give us the full details of Mr. Magoo’s childhood, but we can still consider some possibilities. What reasons might Mr. Magoo have felt all alone?
- Are there ever times when you feel all alone, or unnoticed? When are some of those times?

### Listening to the Scriptures:

Read Psalm 138 aloud. Allow time for students to offer their initial insights or questions about the passage. You might consider asking a question like the following:

- What details stand out to you in this reading? (*Students are invited to name details they find confusing, interesting, troubling etc.*) Why does this stand out to you?

You will want to consult Tony’s commentary to help address any questions students may raise after their initial reading of the psalm. After students have had a chance to share continue the discussion by asking questions like the following:

- Although this psalm is one of significant praise, but do you hear anything in the psalm that indicates it is not the best of times? If so, what are those indicators?
- Although the psalmist praises God for God’s faithfulness, do hear anything that sounds like he/she may still have some lingering uncertainty that God will continue to respond? If so, what? (See v.8)
- The psalmist says, “for though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly....” What do you think this means?

## Listening to the Scripture *continued*

Although there is certainly indication in the scripture of such a reversal, in which God has this affinity for the poor, the weak, the powerless, and the voiceless, today we focus on those times when we feel lowly. For youth, oftentimes low self-esteem and loneliness leave them feeling as if they are all alone, as if no one really notices them.

- Are there ever times when you would consider yourself to be “lowly?” What do those moments feel like for you?
- Verses 7-8 offer a word of hope. What do you hear when you read those verses?
- What do you think is meant by the phrase “your steadfast love?”

It is important here to emphasize that God takes notice of us. God is with us in those moments of struggle. God is with us in those moments when we may feel all alone. God loves us with an enduring, unchanging love.

If the group would like to go deeper with today’s lesson, see Tony’s section titled *Digging Deeper*. Consider asking questions like the following:

- The psalmist begins by declaring “*I praise you with my whole heart.*” What do you think it means to praise God with our whole heart?

*(To do so is to praise God with every fiber of our being: our thinking, our love, and our loyalty. See Tony’s commentary.)*

- Can you think of examples of what it might look like to praise God with our whole heart?

Perhaps another way to put it is to say that we bring all our lives into God’s presence. All our uncertainties, insecurities, doubts, joys, concerns. Our work, our play, our relationships. We praise God with all of ourselves.

- The psalmist remembers the past works God has done in his/her life? Why do you think this act of remembering is important?

*(Note: the psalm moves from remembering God’s past work to the psalmist’s plea in the present. It seems the act of remembering God’s past faithfulness gives hope in the present. Hope, tinged with a little uncertainty, but hope, nonetheless.)*

If the group is up for a challenge, consider tackling what Tony poses as *The Hardest Question*.

- Does this psalm sound familiar?

## Application

Before closing, introduce this week’s challenge.

*This week, post pictures of things on social media that reminds you of God’s unending/steadfast love for you. Come back next week prepared to share at least one thing you posted, and why.*

Close with prayer.

## 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](http://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 *ʿeshtahevōt* 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

## Digging Deeper *continued*

of “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.]