

GOALS FOR THE GROUP LEADER

Help the group members to understand:

1. that there exists various kinds of literature in the Bible and that every genre of literature must be explained correctly in accordance with the rules of that genre
2. that God also speaks to us through biblical poetry, figurative speech, wisdom literature and music

I. WORSHIP (14 min.)

1. Prayer

Pray that God will guide us through his Spirit; that we will be aware of his presence and that we will listen to what he says.

2. Meditation

Worship is to stand in awe of God's unfathomable nature.

Theme: God is unfathomable

Read the Bible verses mentioned below and the explanation. Or explain the verses in your own words.

➤ *God stands above time and yet reveals himself in time*

Psalm 90:4

⁴ For a thousand years in your sight are like a Day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.

God is not bound by the limitations of time or by time in the sense of past, present and future. He stands absolutely above time and human history. God is able to move backwards and forwards in time and is able to slow down or increase time.

'Time' for human beings is a (one dimensional) straight line moving only in one direction from point A to point B, that is, time can only move forward. But 'time' for God can be depicted as a (two dimensional) plane in which the time-lines can move in every direction¹.

De 'time' needed for the creation of the universe is of a divine nature and cannot be expressed in terms of how humans calculate time. Compare 'a divine creation day'

(Genesis 1:5) with 'a human Day of 24 hours' (Genesis 1:14).

Also in human history God stands above time. He knows and directs the events in human history. "He makes known the end from the beginning" and "from ancient times, what is still to come" (Isaiah 46:10). He announces ahead of time what is going to happen so that the gods of the other religions cannot take the credit for being 'gods' (Isaiah 48:5).

Nevertheless, God reveals himself within time as human experience it and within human history as humans calculate it, because this was the only way in which God could reveal himself as a reality to human beings (Galatians 4:4).

➤ *God's thoughts are unfathomable and yet people are able to understand what God says*

Isaiah 55:8-9

⁸ "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.

⁹ "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Deuteronomy 29:29

²⁹ The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

God's motivation (the question 'why?') for the creation, the fall of man into sin, the salvation of the elect and the condemnation of the unrighteous belong to God's secrets – his eternal decree (plan) – and cannot be explained by rational arguments. Sometimes God has thoughts, plans and ways of doing things, which he does not reveal to man. But they nevertheless fit perfectly in his eternal, sovereign and perfect plan for our life. There are many things with regard to God himself, history, his plan of salvation, and our personal lives, which he has not revealed to us. These things belong to God's hidden secrets. But there are also many things which God has revealed to us. These things belong to God's revelation.

Because God's thoughts, plans and decisions remain unfathomable for man, Christians ought to concentrate on what God has revealed instead of on what he has not revealed! God has revealed them so that we may know

¹ *The Creator and the Cosmos, Hugh Ross, 2001, page 112-113.*

him and his will and so that we may obey him and live according to his will.

➤ God's power is unlimited

Jeremiah 32:17, 27

¹⁷ "Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.

²⁷ "I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?"

The problems, inability and misfortunes of people cannot hinder, thwart or limit God. Nothing is too wonderful for God. Nothing is impossible for God (Luke 1:37). God is Almighty in the whole universe. He is not only able to do what he decided, but actually does what he decided to do. He carries out his eternal plan and no one and nothing can thwart it (Isaiah 14:24,27).

➤ God's knowledge is unlimited

Psalms 139:1-4

¹ O LORD, you have searched me and you know me.

² You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.

³ You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.

⁴ Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.

God sees and knows everything – the visible as well as the invisible, the outward as well as the inward, the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual realities. "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13)

➤ God's presence is unlimited

Psalms 139:7-12

⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths (Hebrew: sheol), you are there.

⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,"

¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

God is Spirit and therefore not limited as man to one physical body or to one physical place on earth. He is everywhere in the created universe at the same time and also above the created universe. No one can hide from God or go somewhere God is not present.

Conclusion: Although no one can fathom God's being and nature, his wonderful personality and perfect characteristics (attributes), his presence and his abilities, his eternal plan and motives, we can understand all these to the extent that he has revealed them to us in the Bible and in Jesus Christ.

True worship is not only having a deep respect and awe towards the unfathomable God, but is also to dedicate yourself to get to know him to the extent that he has revealed himself in the Bible and in Christ.

3. Worship

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to worship God (in one or two sentences) as the unfathomable God, whom we may personally know to the extent that he has revealed himself.

II. INTRODUCTION THEME (1 min.)

The theme for this meeting is: The poetical books

Read or explain in your own words

Different types of literature in the Bible demands different rules of interpretation. The Bible contains several different genres of literature: laws, history, poetry, prophecy and teaching. Every type of literature must be explained according to its own rules.

Biblical poetry is not only found in the books Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs and Lamentations, but also in parts of the Old Testament prophets and in the teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostles in the New Testament.

III. SHARING OF QUIET TIMES (30 min.)

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to share (or read) what he has learned from one of the assigned quiet times.

Theme: The poetical books in the Bible

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|---------------------|--|
| Day 1 ^{BS} | Psalms 103:1-22
A Psalm about God's benefits |
| Day 2 | Psalms 139:1-24
God's omniscience |
| Day 3 | Proverbs 16:1-9
God alone makes plans succeed |
| Day 4 | Proverbs 26:4-12
What is wise? |

- Day 5 Ecclesiastes 4:7-12
Two are better than one
- Day 6 Ecclesiastes 11:7 – 12:14
Remember your Creator before it is too late
- Day 7 Song of Songs 1:1 – 2:17
A song of a lover and his beloved
- Day 8 Lamentations 3:1-27
Despair and hope
- Day 9 Job 1:1 – 2:13.
Job, who believes in God, is tested by Satan
- Day 10 Job 40:15 – 41:14
The Maker of the hippopotamus (behemoth) and the crocodile (leviathan)

IV. ADDITIONAL SHARING (15 min.)

Part IV is optional.
If after sharing quiet times there is still time left over, the following may serve as subjects for conversation.

1. Discussing the study

Discuss the study with reference to the questions mentioned below:

Theme: The poetical books

- How do you explain the metaphor in Psalm 23:1?
- How do you explain the paradox in Revelation 20:5-6?
- What is the purpose of parallelism in Psalm 1:1-3?
- Why does the Old Testament poet make use of exaggerated (hyperbolic) statements in Psalm 10:15 and Psalm 28:4-5?
- What is the purpose of the book of Job?
- What is the purpose of the book of Ecclesiastes?

2. Commitment

Let the group members consider the following questions and record their answers:

- “In what respect must you change the way in which you explain poetry in the Bible?”
- “How would you use the Psalms in your prayers?”
- “In order to become wiser, how could you meditate regularly on Proverbs?”

3. Personal sharing

Discuss personal growth and commitment. Who would like to share a difficulty or blessing in his/her personal life? What are your thoughts or feelings?

V. MEMORISATION (5 min.)

1. Review previous Bible verses

Let pairs of group members review each other’s previously memorised Bible verses (the last memorised Bible verse or the last 5 memorised Bible verses).

2. Memorisation of the new Bible verse

Explain the meaning of the new Bible verse.

THE POETICAL BOOKS Proverbs 9:10

The fear of the LORD
is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One
is understanding
Proverbs 9:10 (NIV)

3. Memorisation of the Bible books

The 5 poetical books:

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs

The 5 major prophets:

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel and Daniel.

VI. BIBLE STUDY (45 min.)

Theme: A Psalm about God’s benefits

1. Bible Study

Make use of the 5 step Bible Study method and study:

Psalm 103:1-22

¹ Praise the LORD, O my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.

² Praise the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits-

³ who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,

⁴ who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,

⁵ who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

⁶ The LORD works righteousness
and justice for all the oppressed.

⁷ He made known his ways to Moses,
his deeds to the people of Israel:

⁸ The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.

⁹ He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbour his anger forever;

¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.

¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;

¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

¹³ As a father has compassion on his children,
 so the LORD has compassion on those who fear
 him;
¹⁴ for he knows how we are formed,
 he remembers that we are dust.
¹⁵ As for man, his days are like grass,
 he flourishes like a flower of the field;
¹⁶ the wind blows over it and it is gone,
 and its place remembers it no more.
¹⁷ But from everlasting to everlasting
 the LORD's love is with those who fear him,
 and his righteousness with their children's children-
¹⁸ with those who keep his covenant
 and remember to obey his precepts.

¹⁹ The LORD has established his throne in heaven,
 and his kingdom rules over all.
²⁰ Praise the LORD, you his angels,
 you mighty ones who do his bidding,
 who obey his word.
²¹ Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts,
 you his servants who do his will.
²² Praise the LORD, all his works
 everywhere in his dominion.
 Praise the LORD, O my soul.

2. Emphasis

Do not forget any of God's benefits!

3. Explanation for the group leader

103:1-2. *Soul*

While the body is the visible reality of man, his soul (verse 1) or spirit is his invisible reality. The 'soul' represents "everything that is in him": his mind, (e.g. thoughts, convictions, remembrances: not forgetting God's benefits), will (e.g. choices and decisions), emotions (e.g. love), character (e.g. just), conscience, intuition, creative abilities and spiritual abilities (e.g. knowing God and relating to God). What God has done should never be forgotten (verse 2).

103:3-5. *Healing*

The poet possibly survived a very serious illness. He experienced his sickness as the revelation of God's wrath against sin. He experienced his healing as God's gracious forgiveness of his sins (verse 3) and as God's faithfulness and loving compassion (verse 4). That is why he praises God (verse 1).

When God forgives all unrighteousness, he declares, regards and treats you as completely righteous in his eyes. The forgiveness or justification is always only on the ground of God's work of salvation in and through Jesus Christ (his death and resurrection), is only given by God's mercy and grace and can only be accepted by the faith of man!

The poet says: "Who heals all your diseases" (verse 3). Many believers have experienced God's healing of serious and even deadly sicknesses. Their life was as it were redeemed from the grave (the pit). They received new life as if they were young again. In folktales the eagle renews its feathers every year and therefore seems to maintain the power of youth that does not weaken (verse 5; cf. Isaiah 40:29-31). Nevertheless, although people are healed in this life, eventually they must all die. The ultimate healing of all sicknesses of people will take place at the second coming of Christ at the resurrection of the dead. Only then will every form of physical death be conquered (1 Corinthians 15:26) and only then will all believers in Jesus Christ be resurrected from the dead and experience how their lowly bodies is transformed to be like the glorious body of Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:21; cf. Revelation 21:4).

103:6-7. *Justice*

The author's own experience of God's forgiveness and goodness causes him to recall God's undeserved forgiveness and overflowing goodness to God's people throughout history. Whoever is oppressed by enemies may expect that God will work righteousness in his own time and in his own way. In the past God revealed his law to Moses. And when they rebelled against God and God handed them over to be conquered by their enemies, he again and again revealed his mighty deeds (verse 7).

103:8-12. *Forgiveness*

The One True and Living God is characterised by his mercy, grace, faithfulness and especially his recurrent patience (verse 8-9) and not only for his righteous anger and punishments.

God punishes our sins that have not been confessed, but not according to what we really deserve. God's final goal is not to punish us, but to draw us back to himself. His discipline is a means to a higher goal. Although our sins deserve the severest punishment, God's forgiving love and compassion triumphs over his judgement (verse 10; cf. James 2:13).

God's love for those who fear him has no limit (cf. Romans 8:38-39). It is as high as the heavens above the earth, that is, immeasurable (verse 11).

This 'fear' does not imply that a person must be afraid or anxious in God's presence. On the one hand he regards God with awe (deep, holy respect) and realises that God will punish every form of disobedience and evil. On the other hand he trusts God with all his heart (just like a child) and realises that God has granted him his gracious forgiving love. To fear God means to know God, to approach him and fellowship with him with confidence, to obey him and to serve him.

God's forgiveness has no limit as it often has with people. He removes our transgressions from us as far as the east is from the west (verse 12). He forgives in a way that the transgressions never again appear on the account of the transgressor (cf. Micah 7:18-19; Hebrews 8:12).

103:13-18. Compassion

God's compassion is for his children, who fear him (verse 13). God, the King of the world, becomes the Father of his children on earth. He lives amidst his great family on earth and opens his father-heart for them. He would finally descend from his unapproachable dwelling place and come to dwell among his children (John 1:1,14).

God created man in his image. On the one hand man is a wonderful created being, and on the other hand he remains weak (dust) and vulnerable (mortal) (verse 14). Man only lives for a very short time on earth – he grows and blossoms before the scorching wind of the desert ends his life (verse 15-16).

It is against this dark and gloomy background of the temporary life on earth that God's eternal love and goodness for those who fear him shines even brighter!

To fear God means to live as his covenant people. Within his covenant God does what is right (righteousness) to your children and children's children and even to later generations (cf. Exodus 20:6; 1 Corinthians 7:14). God, our heavenly Father, lets his light shine on our short life on earth. Whoever fellowships confidentially with him, is lifted up above this temporary life (verse 17-18).

103:19-22. Praise

God has established his throne in heaven and from there he reigns with sovereignty over everyone and everything (verse 19). God's throne is surrounded by uncountable number of angels who carry out his bidding and realises his purposes for believers (1 Kings 22:19; Hebrews 1:14) (verse 20).

God's praise must not only be heard on earth from the mouths of his children who experience his love and goodness. The poet calls everyone in the universe (the heavenly hosts) (verse 21) and everyone and everything on earth to sing God's praise. The creation, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the flowers, the rivers, the birds, the animals and the fishes are called to praise the LORD (verse 22) (cf. Isaiah 55:12b; Revelation 5:11-13).

VII. PRAYER (8 min.)

Pray with one another in response to what God said to you during this gathering. Let every group member take a turn to pray one or two sentences about what God taught him during this meeting.

Pray with one another for one another (Romans 15:30) and for other people (Colossians 4:12).

VIII. THE NEXT MEETING (2 min.)

Hand out the preparation for the next gathering.