

# FORMATIONS

## TEACHING GUIDE

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# THE TEACHING GUIDE IS **NEW!**

This new Teaching Guide has three purposes:

- to give the teacher tools for focusing on the content of the session in the Learner's Study Guide.
- to give the teacher additional Bible background information.
- to give the teacher variety and choice in preparation.

The Teaching Guide includes two major components: Teacher Helps and Teacher Option.

## Teacher Helps

### Bible Background

The Learner's Study Guide is still your main source of Bible study material. This new section helps you more fully understand and interpret the Scripture text.

January 4, 2004

### FOLLOWING GOD...IN STRUGGLE

Psalm 13

**Prepare Before the Lesson**  
Read the lesson for today in the Learner's Study Guide. Then read the options in this Teaching Guide, placing checkmarks beside the activities you plan to include. Also you have studied which options you can gather the appropriate materials.

**Bible Background**  
A more descriptive name for the book of Psalms might be the *Book of Prayers*. There are five generally recognized divisions within the book. According to an ancient interpretation, the books of the Psalms receive the first books of the Pentateuch (Deuterium, etc.). The divisions are chapters 1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, and 107-150 (Tan, 403). The significance of these divisions and the way they were used in Jewish worship are matters of speculation. However, it is clear that the Jews used these song-prayers for worship and for growing in their faith in Psalms.

grouping differs a similar style and form. Understanding the genre of a particular psalm is one step toward understanding the psalm within its unique context. Another aspect of understanding the context of a Scripture passage is to try to understand the circumstances under which it was written and what it meant to the first readers. Since we can't come to specific writers for each psalm, it is impossible to place the individual psalms within specific historical periods, but, the emotional and spiritual situations are plain. The writer addressed concerns that reach across the years, and they put into words many of the feelings we still experience today.

### Teaching Outline

provides you with an outline of the main themes in the Learner's Study Guide.

within the collection. Feelings of alienation, abandonment, frustration, and depression are common experiences that reach across all boundaries. We may not experience the exact circumstances of the psalmist, but the words seem familiar to us.

The first words of despair in Psalm 13 (verse 1) are God's promise of care. Many of us know the pain and isolation and feel it in the words of verse 1: "How long, O Lord, will you ignore me long enough? How long will you ignore me long enough?" Think about the experiences that would prompt such a cry of anguish. Someone feels like a victim of forces he or she can't control, and God seems absent.

Sometimes our religion is our problem, or at least our perceived world dilemma. Faith, on the other hand, includes experiences and emotions, often at their most fundamental levels. The stark honesty of the complainer psalmist is sometimes shocking. The psalmist expressed intense displeasure with God. Behind the complaint is an authentic desire for help, for a validation of faith. The writer was a seeker in the great sense of the word—not someone who longed for an easier packaging of religion, but one who longed for a faith with substance. While the Bible abounds with examples of judgment for the person who tries to live an artificial faith, careful study of Scripture shows that God never punishes or ignores the honest seeker. When we express doubt honestly, it can become the stepping stone of faith.

The psalmist addressed God with confessional honesty: "You've ignored me long enough!" The closing words, though, anticipate the fulfillment of faith. Even while acknowledging what felt like God's absence, the writer recalled how God had been so in the past. That memory and the decision to believe carried him through. Things were rough at the time, but a time of celebration would come. Faith is a wonderful thing when we walk the steep paths of life.

Many faith, however, may have to be found in unexpected places. The psalmist had hope. God had the psalmist's call and God would answer. This assurance transforms the psalmist of complaint. Even as the psalmist vented frustration, he concluded his prayer with a declaration of faith.

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## Outline FOR TEACHING

Introduction: Psalm 13 is a prayer of lament and complaint against God. Though it begins with an expression of the psalmist's feelings of abandonment and isolation, it concludes with an affirmation of faith.

- The psalmist (13:1-2)
  - The psalmist believed that God had turned away. The writer felt alone and abandoned (13:1). In the beginning, the writer shares the perspective that misunderstanding is the root.
  - The second phrase shows the psalmist's concern that those who are against him (and by implication against God) are enjoying the psalmist's suffering (13:2).
- The psalmist (13:3-4)
  - He is the psalmist, or great request, of the psalmist. The psalmist is high for the writer. Without God's intervention, the psalmist fears that there is no work being (13:4).
  - Once again the writer pleads for the forgiveness of all who are against him (13:4).
- The psalmist (13:5-6)
  - The past and the present come together. The psalmist has known God, and that time has been affirming God's action in the past. Now faith begins to take hold, even amid despair (13:5).
  - The confidence of assurance is already being placed, and it acts on behalf of the psalmist as assurance. It is faith of which is based on experience and leads to hope (13:6).

Following God...in Struggle 5

### And That's Not All...

For each session, you can find detailed remarks in the *Formations Commentary*, *Weekly Formations Support*, and *Baptists Today*

# Teacher Options

The next three sections provide a beginning, middle, and end for the session, with focus paragraphs in between.

## Focus Paragraphs



are printed in italics at the top of the page because they are the most important part of the Teaching Guide. These paragraphs will help you to move your class from “what the text meant” to “what the text means.”

## You Can Choose!

There is more material in each session than you can use, so choose one option from each section to tailor the session to the needs of your group.

### A Way to Begin

**1** *As you read Psalm 13, keep in mind that the writer's pain and frustration were real. Their feelings arose from experiences in the psalmist's life similar to our own moments of great distress. This writer endured personal pain and, for reasons not readily apparent, felt cut off from God. As the psalm progresses, we see a transformation begin. The psalmist realized that God could be trusted. With hope beginning to grow, the psalmist planned a celebration of God's faithfulness. We see here from the writer's hope. Though circumstances may seem to be full of darkness and despair with God, ultimately God remains true. As we have found God sufficient in our past experiences, both great and small, God will also be present with us in whatever we currently face.*

□ *Stare to the Blind* □ *Where is God?*

### A Way to Explore Scripture

**2** *As long as we have emotions, we will know pain. Because we love, we will know grief. Because we can hope, we will know delight. Because we long for completeness, we will know loneliness. Sometimes it's depressing, doesn't it? But turn the pages around and we begin to see that love and grief can be two sides of the same coin. From the psalmist's words of despair, we can hear a promise of hope. Psalm 13 concludes with an expectation of deliverance and celebration. Read the words of the text again. Think of times you have experienced these feelings in your life. What was happening? How did God bring you through? Maybe you didn't see God at work at first. Still, the experiences of the past assure us how true faith is in the present.*

□ *The Changing of the Tide* □ *The Primary Players*

### A Way to End

**3** *The night will be the last verses of Psalm 13 "Waiting for the Morning" (Whatever mood the psalmist is in about his feelings, the emotions he expressed were far from sleep-induced haze. They were not merely words of hypothetical meaning. Would anyone be so confrontational with God unless they truly believed God had wronged them in some way? Despite his agonizing work, the psalmist asked the prayer of getting ready for the party. With a certainty born of faith, the psalmist knew that God's presence would be evident. When that happened, it would be time to celebrate.*

**The writer expected that God would do in the present what God had done in the past. The memory of God's actions was enough to encourage the psalmist's faith. Sometimes that's what makes the difference between rising to the challenge or getting swept away in the life of despair. Have we decided that we will believe? If we have, then we're not surprised when the psalmist starts planning the party. We know nothing could be more appropriate.**

□ *Samaria, Samaria*  
"Samaria, Samaria" is one of the songs from the musical *Hallel on the Roof*. While it speaks of the unending passage of time, it also ties together two images filled with meaning. The sunrise offers both hope and promise, the possibility of new beginnings, and second chances. The sunrise may carry the promise of new, but it may also bear the sense of gathering darkness and fire, leading, by a strange coincidence, without a familiar point of reference, it is impossible to tell the difference between sunrise and sunset.

□ *The Divider*  
Psalm 13 is the testimony of a believer who found a devastating experience but decided to believe in God, to trust that God treats believers with care and love. For the psalmist, the pain that engulfed the someone was that God had been faithful to show compassion and care in the past.

Belief and trust don't develop in a flash; they happen in the life of a disciple of Christ, each day, in a dozen small ways, with simple prayers answered and daily promises kept. These experiences set the stage for a positive outcome of the struggle of faith. The only faith that can be depended upon in dire emergency is the faith that has been nurtured through the ordinary days.

Close your session with a challenge to your group to make a deliberate decision for faith each day. Such a decision is the best way to prepare for the traumatic times that might come their way.

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## Resource Kits Also Available

EVEN WHEN WE FEEL LOST AND ALONE, FAITH CAUSES US TO REACH OUT TO GOD.

Unit 1 • Following God

# FOLLOWING GOD...IN STRUGGLE

## Psalm 13

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### Prepare Before the Session

Read the session for today in the Learner's Study Guide. Then read the options in this Teaching Guide, placing checkmarks beside the activities you plan to include. After you have decided which options to use, gather the appropriate materials.

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### Bible Background



A more descriptive name for the *book* of Psalms might be the *books* of Psalms. There are five generally recognized divisions within the book. According to an ancient interpretation, the books of the Psalms mirror the five books of the Pentateuch (Dahood, xxxi). The divisions are chapters 1–41, 42–72, 73–89, 90–106, and 107–150 (Tate, 433). The significance of these divisions and the way they were used in Jewish worship are matters of speculation. However, it is clear that the Jews used these song-prayers for worship and for growing in their faith. In Psalms, the insight into the divine/human relationship reaches a peak unparalleled anywhere within the Bible outside of the Gospels.

When interpreting any passage of Scripture, it is important to gain an understanding of the context in which it was written. We learn context by looking at how a specific text relates to other parts of the same book or chapter or by comparing it to other books by the same writer. One New Testament example for this comparison would be to study the writings of Paul and find the recurring themes and parallel ideas between the different books. This method works for Paul but not for Psalms. Over several years, many different writers composed the psalms. Though the question of authorship remains open, we can identify different genres or types of psalms. Each

grouping follows a similar style and form. Understanding the genre of a particular psalm is one step toward understanding the psalm within its unique context.

Another aspect of understanding the context of a Scripture passage is to try to understand the circumstances under which it was written and what it meant to the first readers. Since we can't name a specific writer for each psalm, it is impossible to place the individual psalms within specific historical periods. Still, the emotional and spiritual situations are plain. The writers addressed concerns that reach across the years, and they put into words many of the feelings we still experience today.

In some instances, it's easy to imagine the circumstances that might have prompted the writing of a particular psalm. Psalm 8 is ascribed to David. As we read, we can picture the king as an older man roaming the palace halls at night, looking to the heavens that had served as his roof when he was a shepherd boy. Now, as king, he experiences the complexities of authority. Maybe he longs for a simpler time. Maybe he longs for a simpler faith. This kind of experience resonates with our own. Some may interpret the situation in Psalm 8 differently, but the emotion still comes through.

Emotion is one reason why the personal lament or complaint psalms touch us so deeply. The lament psalms are the largest category. These psalms touch the common feelings of humankind perhaps better than any other genre

within the collection. Feelings of alienation, abandonment, frustration, and depression are common experiences that reach across all boundaries. We may not experience the exact circumstances of the psalmist, but the words seem familiar to us.

The first words of despair in Psalm 13 challenge God's promise of care. Many of us have felt the pain and isolation embodied in the words from Eugene Peterson's *The Message*: "Long enough, God—you've ignored me long enough." Think about the experiences that would prompt such a cry of anguish. Someone feels like a victim of forces he or she can't control, and God seems absent.

Sometimes our religion is too polite, or at least too concerned with decorum. Faith, on the other hand, includes experiences and emotions, often at their most fundamental levels. The stark honesty of the complaint psalms is sometimes shocking. The psalmist expressed intense displeasure with God. Behind the complaint is an authentic desire for belief, for a validation of faith. The writer was a seeker in the truest sense of the word—not someone who longed for an easier packaging of religion, but one who longed for a faith with substance. While the Bible abounds with examples of judgment for the person who tries to live an artificial faith, careful study of Scripture shows that God never punishes or ignores the honest seeker. When we express doubt honestly, it can become the stepping stone of faith.

The psalmist addressed God with confrontational honesty: "You've ignored me long enough." The closing words, though, anticipate the fulfillment of faith. Even while acknowledging what felt like God's absence, the writer recalled how God had been true in the past. That memory and the decision to believe carried him through. Things were tough at the time, but a time of celebration would come. Faith is a wonderful thing when we walk the easy paths of life.

Mature faith, however, may have to be found in unexpected places.

The psalmist had hope. God heard the psalmist's call and God would answer. This assurance transforms the psalm of complaint. Even as the psalmist vented frustration, he concluded his prayer with a declaration of faith.

## Outline

### FOR TEACHING

Introduction: Psalm 13 is a prayer of lament and complaint against God. Though it begins with an expression of the psalmist's feelings of abandonment and isolation, it concludes with an affirmation of faith.

#### I. The Indictment (13:1-2)

- A. The psalmist believes that God has turned away. The writer feels alone and abandoned (v. 1). In the first phrase, the writer shares the spiritual pain that reaches deep into the soul.
- B. The second phrase shows the psalmist's concern that those who are against him (and by implication against God) are enjoying the psalmist's suffering (v. 2).

#### II. The Prayer (13:3-4)

- A. Here is the petition, or prayer request, of the psalmist. The stakes are high for the writer. Without God's intervention, the psalmist feels that life is not worth living (v. 3).
- B. Once again the writer alludes to the forces of evil who will rejoice at the failure of one of God's chosen (v. 4).

#### III. The Declaration of Faith (13:5-6)

- A. The past and the present come together. The psalmist has trusted God, and that trust has been affirmed by God's action in the past. Now faith begins to take hold, even amid despair (v. 5).
- B. The celebration of deliverance is already being planned. God's action on behalf of the psalmist is assumed. It is faith at work—faith based on experience and lived in hope (v. 6).

## A Way to Begin

**1** As you read Psalm 13, keep in mind that the writer's pain and frustration were real. These feelings arose from experiences in the psalmist's life similar to our own moments of great distress. This writer endured personal pain and, for reasons not readily apparent, felt cut off from God. **As the psalm progresses, we see a transformation begin.**

The psalmist recalled that God could be trusted. With hope beginning to grow, the psalmist planned a celebration of fulfilled faith. We can learn from the writer's hope. Though circumstances may cause us to feel isolated and out of touch with God, ultimately God remains true. As we have found God sufficient in our past experiences, both great and small, God will also be present with us in whatever we currently face.

### ○ Stars to the Blind

Read the first verse of today's text to your group. Ask them to consider the feelings expressed by the psalmist. How would you describe what this writer might have experienced? One possible description might be that the psalmist was in the depths of severe depression. Frederick Buechner described depression as the experience of being "unable to occupy yourself with anything much except your state of depression. Even the greatest thing is like a shower of stars to the blind" (38).

Ask your group to think of times when they were unable to see beyond a specific problem or time of hardship in their lives. In these moments, we often focus all our energy on the problem. Sometimes that focus helps us marshal our emotional, physical, and spiritual resources to deal with the problem. At other times, however, we are blinded to positive alternatives and to the process of renewal within us. Ask your group to consider what becomes an avenue of restoration for them when they confront a wall of difficulty.

### ○ Where Is God?

The cry "Long enough, God—you've ignored me long enough" touches us even now. We might say it differently, but our meaning is the same.

In 1991, a young pastor was diagnosed with cancer only three months after his mother died from the same illness. This news capped a four-year period of illness and injury for his family. On his first Sunday after having surgery, he preached a message titled "A Good Theology for Bad Times." The pastor recounted with the congregation some of the events of the preceding months and asked, "Where is God in all this?" (Benton, 122). Then he delivered his message. In good preacher form, he offered three basic points: (1) recognize the facts—life is a mixed bag; (2) recognize the Father—God loves us and would not do anything to us that the best parent wouldn't do; and (3) recognize the future—there are answers out there that we simply haven't seen yet. Though cancer eventually claimed his life, this young minister literally lived what he preached.

People of faith naturally look to God when they face tragic news or circumstances. The psalmist clearly was looking for God when he said, "Long enough, God." That's the difference of faith. People without faith don't expect to see God; they don't assume God's presence. Yet even when a believer cries out in anger and frustration, he or she *assumes* a response from God.

Ask your group to consider times in their lives when they have asked, or at least wanted to ask, "Where is God in all this?"

## A Way to Explore Scripture

2 As long as we have emotions, we will know pain. Because we love, we will know grief. Because we can hope, we will know despair. Because we long for companionship, we will know loneliness. Sounds a bit depressing, doesn't it? But turn the phrases around and we begin to see that love and grief can be two sides of the same coin. From the psalmist's words of despair, we can hear a promise of hope. **Psalm 13 concludes with an expectation of deliverance and celebration.** Read the words of the text again. Think of how you have experienced these feelings in your life. What was happening? How did God bring you through? Maybe you didn't see God at work at first. Still, the experiences of the past teach us how to have faith in the present.

### ○ The Changing of the Tide



Sitting beside a saltwater marsh, a person can sense the changing of the tide.

Though several hundred yards away from the beach and completely out of sight of the ocean, the change in the depth and character of the water tells an observer which way the tide is moving. Many changes take place—some subtle, others more dramatic. All point to a bigger change.

The possibility of change is part of Psalm 13. Though the Scripture begins with a climate of indictment, it concludes with an expression of hope. The tone communicates the change beginning in the prayer of the psalmist. Give three group members a copy of the Resource Kit page “Psalm 13.” Ask each person to read a portion of the psalm as printed. Encourage them to be demonstrative in their reading, conveying the emotion that seems appropriate. Open a time of discussion by asking how other group members might have read these verses differently and why.

### Questions

- What emotions do you hear expressed in the Scripture?
- As you read the psalm, where does the tide turn? Where does expectation of God's intervention replace the sense of God's abandonment?
- As you consider this passage of Scripture, what similar experiences have you had? Where did the “tide turn” for you?

### ○ The Primary Players

Psalm 13 has three primary characters—the psalmist, God, and the psalmist's adversaries, whom we might describe as the unbelieving world. Form three small groups. One group will play the role of the psalmist, another the adversary, and the final group will speak for God. Ask the groups to try to put into words any ideas or feelings that arise for them from the text. Imagine what the psalmist might have said if Psalm 13 continued beyond verse 6. In our cynical world, finding the words for the adversary might be almost too easy. Based on your understanding of God's love and grace, constancy and consistency, what would God want the psalmist to know? Each group should put whatever thoughts and emotions they imagine into the voice of their character. Then, as a large group, share what you've discussed. Afterward, discuss the following questions.

### Questions

- How did it feel to begin the transition from abandonment to hope? What in your experience would make such a transition possible?
- How easy was it to be the adversary? What questions or comments were the most uncomfortable?
- Did you believe that you needed to “defend” God? How did you feel about the confrontational tone of the psalmist's first words?

## A Way to End

**3** You might call the last verses of Psalm 13 “Waiting for the Party.” Whatever moved the psalmist to write about his feelings, the emotions he expressed were borne from sharp pain and heartache. They were not merely words of hypothetical musing. Would anyone be so confrontational with God unless they truly believed God had wronged them in some way? Despite his accusing words, the psalmist ended the prayer by getting ready for the party. With a certainty borne of faith, the psalmist knew that God’s presence would be evident. When that happened, it would be time to celebrate.

**The writer expected that God would do in the present what God had done in the past.** The memory of God’s action was enough to overcome the psalmist’s doubt. Sometimes that’s what makes the difference between rising to the challenge or getting swept away in the tide of despair. Have we decided that we will believe? If we have, then we’re not surprised when the psalmist starts planning the party. We know nothing could be more appropriate.

### ○ Sunrise, Sunset

“Sunrise, Sunset” is one of the songs from the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. While it speaks of the unrelenting passage of time, it also ties together two images filled with meaning. The sunrise offers fresh hope and promise, the possibility of new beginnings and second chances. The sunset may carry the promise of rest, but it may also bear the sense of gathering darkness and foreboding. By a strange coincidence, without a familiar point of reference, it is impossible to tell the difference between sunrise and sunset.

During your preparation for this study, find a picture of a sunrise. Make sure the picture is large enough to be seen and distinct enough to be recognized as a sunrise or sunset. Instruct your group to reflect on the picture. Explain that when we look at the still picture, we can’t determine if this is a sunrise or a sunset. The difference relies entirely on perspective. Use this reflection to lead into the following closing prayer:

Dear God, in my life and in the lives of those close to me, I’ve known sunrises and sunsets. Help me see in the sunrise the promise of growing light to chase away fear and frustration. Help me see the world with a sense of renewed hope that each

dawn really does bring a new day. Help me also, Lord, to see in the sunset not the dreaded approach of gloom and shadows, but the peaceful opportunity for rest and recovery. To this end we pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

### ○ The Decider

Psalm 13 is the testimony of a believer who faced a devastating experience but decided to believe in God, to trust that God treats believers with care and love. For the psalmist, the point that swayed the outcome was that God had been faithful to show compassion and care in the past.

Belief and trust don’t develop in a flash; they happen in the life of a disciple of Christ each day, in a dozen small ways, with simple prayers answered and daily promises kept. These experiences set the stage for a positive outcome of the struggle of faith. The only faith that can be depended upon in dire emergency is the faith that has been nurtured through the ordinary days.

Close your session with a challenge to your group to make a deliberate decision for faith each day. Such a decision is the best way to prepare for the traumatic times that might come their way.