

Psalms, Teacher's Guide

Week 3: From Suffering to Trust

Psalm 22

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Psalm 22 is one of the most quoted Old Testament passages in the Gospels, and it carries enormous doctrinal weight. What is at stake this week is the meaning of the cross itself: the reality of Christ's suffering, the mystery of His cry of forsakenness, the precision of prophecy fulfilled, and the movement from atoning death to vindication and the gathering of the nations. Jesus prayed verse 1 from the cross (Matthew 27:46), and the Gospel writers saw verses 16 and 18 fulfilled before their eyes. Hebrews 2:12 places verse 22 on the lips of the risen Christ. Handle the cry of dereliction with care: Jesus genuinely bore the weight of our sin and felt the horror of separation it brings, yet He was never less than the beloved Son, and by quoting Psalm 22 He was pointing to the vindication the psalm promises, not announcing final defeat.

This psalm also forms us at the deepest level. It teaches sufferers that the path to God runs through honest cries, remembered faithfulness, and a deliberate turn toward trust and testimony, and it does so by showing us our Savior walking that very path ahead of us. Because Jesus felt forsaken, the believer who feels abandoned is not outside His experience but inside it. And because Jesus did not stay in the dark, neither will those who are united to Him. The pastoral payoff is immense: our worst moments have been entered, carried, and conquered by Christ.

So teach the doctrine of the cross clearly, the atoning death, the bodily resurrection implied in the psalm's turn, and the worldwide reach of the gospel that flows from it. But keep pressing it into the heart. The goal is not only that students understand what happened at Calvary but that they bring their own suffering to the Christ who has already carried the worst of it, and that they join the congregation of verse 22 in telling what He has done.

Question 1

Student Question:

The psalm opens, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?" (v. 1). David wrote these words out of his own suffering, yet Jesus made them His own from the cross. What does it mean that this prayer belongs both to David's experience and, more fully, to Christ, and how should we read an Old Testament psalm that the New Testament applies so directly to Jesus?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the dual nature of this psalm. David wrote it out of real, personal anguish; it was his prayer first. Yet the New Testament applies it to Jesus with such directness that we must call it more than a coincidence of feeling. The early church understood Psalm 22 as prophetic of Christ, a psalm in which David's experience becomes a window onto the suffering of his greater Son.

Explain how this kind of fulfillment works without flattening the difference between the two. We do not say David was secretly talking only about Jesus and not about himself; he was genuinely describing his own ordeal. But the Spirit who inspired the psalm shaped David's words so that they reached beyond his own suffering to describe, in detail David could not have engineered, the death of the Messiah. This is the pattern of much Old Testament prophecy: a real present reality that points to a greater fulfillment in Christ.

Address the hardest part of verse 1 directly: in what sense was Jesus forsaken? On the cross He bore our sin (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24), and He experienced the horror of separation that sin brings. Yet He never ceased to be the beloved Son, and notice that even in the cry He says "my God, my God." The forsakenness was real and dreadful, but it was the forsakenness He took in our place, not a rupture in the eternal love of the Father and the Son.

Show that by quoting verse 1, Jesus was invoking the whole psalm, including its triumphant ending. A Jewish hearer who knew the psalm would have heard not only the opening cry but the trajectory toward vindication. Jesus was not announcing defeat; He was praying a psalm that ends in worldwide praise.

Set the interpretive rule for the week: read the Old Testament psalm in its own setting first, then follow the New Testament's lead in seeing Christ. Let the New Testament writers teach us how to read it, rather than imposing meanings they do not authorize.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Psalm 22 as both David's genuine lament and a prophecy of Christ's suffering.
- How Old Testament prophecy can describe a present reality that points to a greater fulfillment.
- The cry of forsakenness: Christ bearing sin and its separation, yet remaining the beloved Son.
- Jesus invoking the whole psalm, including its triumphant ending, by quoting verse 1.
- Letting the New Testament guide how we read messianic psalms.

Discussion Prompts

- How can a psalm be truly about David and yet more fully about Jesus?
- In what sense was Jesus forsaken, and in what sense was He still the beloved Son?
- Why does it matter that Jesus quoted a psalm that ends in triumph?

Question 2

Student Question:

The sufferer says, “I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest” (v. 2). When have you prayed and prayed and heard only silence? How did that silence affect the way you thought about God, and what did you do with the waiting?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes up the silence of verse 2, “you do not answer.” Almost everyone has known the experience of prayers that seem to go unheard. Invite honest sharing about what that silence felt like and what it tempted them to believe about God.

Help students separate God’s silence from God’s absence. The psalm holds both together: God seems not to answer, yet He is still “my God.” Unanswered prayer is not proof of an absent God; even Jesus prayed into apparent silence and was, in fact, heard and vindicated.

Steer toward what to do in the waiting. The sufferer keeps praying through the night even without an answer. Encourage students that faithfulness in the silence, continuing to pray, continuing to trust, is itself an act of deep faith.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between God’s silence and God’s absence.
- Unanswered prayer as a common experience of the faithful, not a sign of rejection.
- Continuing to pray through silence as an act of faith.
- Jesus’ own experience of apparent silence, yet truly heard.

Discussion Prompts

- What did God’s silence tempt you to believe about Him?
- How is silence different from absence?
- What helps you keep praying when no answer seems to come?

Question 3**Student Question:**

In the middle of his anguish the sufferer remembers, “Yet you are holy... In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them” (vv. 3–5). What does it teach us that he steadies himself by recalling God’s faithfulness in the past, and why is the remembered history of God’s saving acts such an important anchor for faith in the dark?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 3–5 are the sufferer’s first handhold out of the pit: he remembers. “In you our fathers trusted... and you delivered them.” When present experience offers no comfort, he reaches back into the history of God’s faithfulness.

Teach remembering as a spiritual discipline. Israel was constantly commanded to remember the Exodus, the covenant, the mighty acts of God, because memory steadies faith when feelings fail. The sufferer does not deny his pain; he sets it beside the larger story of what God has reliably done.

Note the word “Yet” (v. 3). It marks a deliberate turn of attention from his circumstances to God’s character and track record. This is the same move David made in Psalm 13, and it is one of the most repeated patterns in the Psalms.

Apply it to the Christian. Our supreme remembered act of deliverance is the cross and empty tomb, which we recall every Lord’s Day at the Table. The church’s memory of what God has done in Christ is meant to steady us when our own circumstances are dark.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Remembering God’s past faithfulness as an anchor for present faith.
- Memory as a commanded spiritual discipline throughout Scripture.
- The deliberate “yet” that turns attention from circumstances to God’s character.
- The Lord’s Supper as the church’s weekly act of remembering God’s saving work in Christ.

Discussion Prompts

- What past act of God’s faithfulness most steadies you when things are dark?
- Why is remembering treated as a spiritual discipline in Scripture?
- How does the Lord’s Supper help the church remember and trust?

Question 4

Student Question:

The sufferer is surrounded by people who “mock me... they wag their heads” and say, “He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him” (vv. 7–8). Have you ever felt your faith mocked or dismissed, openly or quietly, by people around you? How did it affect you, and where did you turn?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question takes up the mockery of verses 7–8. The taunt is especially cruel because it weaponizes the sufferer’s own faith: “He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him.” Many believers have felt some version of this, their faith treated as naive or hypocritical.

Help students name where they have felt this, not always in open ridicule, but often in subtle dismissal, the rolled eyes, the excluded conversation, the assumption that thoughtful people have moved past such things. Naming it honestly drains some of its power.

Point to Christ, who endured the same taunt at the cross (Matthew 27:43 echoes this very verse) and did not retaliate. The believer's mockery is a small share in His sufferings (1 Peter 4:14), and it is borne the way He bore it, by entrusting ourselves to the God who judges justly.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The mockery of faith as a real form of suffering.
- Christ enduring the same taunt and not retaliating (Matthew 27:43).
- Sharing in Christ's sufferings when reviled for His name (1 Peter 4:14).
- Entrusting ourselves to God rather than answering scorn with scorn.

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you felt your faith mocked or quietly dismissed?
- How did Jesus respond when His trust in God was thrown back at Him?
- What does it look like to entrust ourselves to God under ridicule?

Question 5

Student Question:

The psalm describes the suffering with stunning detail: "they have pierced my hands and feet... they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots" (vv. 16, 18). The Gospel writers saw these very things at the cross. What does it mean that this psalm, written long before crucifixion existed, describes the death of Jesus so precisely, and what does that tell us about God's plan of salvation unfolding across Scripture?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Walk slowly through the physical details of verses 14–18: bones out of joint, heart melted like wax, strength dried up, tongue stuck to the jaws, hands and feet pierced, garments divided by lot. These describe the experience of crucifixion with uncanny accuracy, and they were written centuries before the Romans devised that form of execution.

Highlight the specific fulfillments the Gospels note: the casting of lots for His clothing (John 19:23–24 cites this very verse), and the piercing (John 19:37; 20:25–27). The detail is too precise to be accident; it is the fingerprint of God's design.

Use this to teach how God's plan of salvation unfolds across Scripture. The cross was not an emergency or an afterthought; it was foretold and prepared for across centuries. From Genesis

3:15 onward, God was unfolding a single plan that culminated at Calvary (Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:10–12). Prophecy fulfilled this precisely is a strong ground for confidence in the Scriptures.

Be careful to keep the wonder pastoral, not merely apologetic. The point is not only that the Bible is impressively accurate, but that the God who planned redemption in such detail planned it for us, and for you.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The precise fulfillment of Psalm 22 in the crucifixion (John 19:23–24, 37).
- Crucifixion described centuries before it was practiced as evidence of inspiration.
- God’s single plan of salvation unfolding from Genesis to Calvary (Acts 2:23).
- Fulfilled prophecy as a ground for confidence in Scripture.
- The cross as planned, not an accident or afterthought.

Discussion Prompts

- Which detail of Psalm 22’s fulfillment strikes you most, and why?
- How does fulfilled prophecy strengthen your confidence in the Bible?
- What does it mean that God planned the cross in such detail for you?

Question 6

Student Question:

From birth the sufferer says, “you have been my God” (v. 10), tracing God’s care all the way back to the womb. Look back over your own life. Where can you trace God’s hand holding you even before you were aware of Him, and how does remembering that history strengthen you for what you face now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question takes up verses 9–10, where the sufferer traces God’s care back to the womb. Invite students to look back over their own lives for the fingerprints of God’s providence before they were even aware of Him.

Help them see ordinary providence as God’s care: the family or friend who first spoke of Christ, the door that opened or closed, the protection they only recognized later. Naming these builds gratitude and steadies present faith.

Connect remembered providence to present courage. The sufferer reasons from “you have been my God from birth” to “be not far from me now.” A remembered history of God’s faithfulness is fuel for present trust.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's providence over a life, often unrecognized until later.
- Tracing God's hand backward as a builder of gratitude and trust.
- Reasoning from past faithfulness to present confidence.
- Providence as personal, not merely general.

Discussion Prompts

- Where can you trace God's hand in your life before you knew Him?
- How does remembering His past care steady you for what you face now?
- What is one specific providence you have never thanked Him for?

Question 7

Student Question:

At verse 22 the psalm turns completely: "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you." The suffering gives way to praise in the gathered assembly. Hebrews 2:11–12 puts these very words in the mouth of Jesus. What does it mean that the risen Christ stands among His people leading their praise, and how does this connect the cross to the life of the church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 22 is the great hinge of the psalm, and the New Testament treats it as enormously significant. The suffering gives way to praise "in the midst of the congregation." Hebrews 2:11–12 places these words on the lips of the risen Jesus, who is "not ashamed to call them brothers."

Draw out the picture: the risen Christ stands among His people and leads their worship. The One who suffered alone is now surrounded by a family. The cross was not the end of His story but the doorway into a congregation of the redeemed who praise God with Him and through Him.

Connect this to the life and worship of the church. When the Lord's church gathers on the first day of the week to praise God, sing, remember Christ at the Table, and hear the Word, we are living out Psalm 22:22. Christ is present in the midst of His people, leading our praise. The assembly is the fruit of the cross.

Note the movement from the individual sufferer to the gathered community. The gospel never leaves us as isolated believers; it gathers us into one body. The personal rescue of verse 21 becomes the corporate praise of verse 22.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The risen Christ leading the praise of His people (Hebrews 2:11–12).
- Christ unashamed to call the redeemed His brothers and sisters.
- The gathered church as the fruit of the cross.

- The assembly's worship on the Lord's Day as the living out of Psalm 22:22.
- The gospel gathering individuals into one worshiping body.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the risen Christ leads our praise in the assembly?
- How does the cross lead directly to the gathered church?
- How might Psalm 22:22 change the way you think about Sunday worship?

Question 8

Student Question:

The rescued sufferer cannot keep the news to himself; he tells of God "in the midst of the congregation" (v. 22) and among "those who seek him" (v. 26). When God has carried you through something hard, do you tend to testify to it or keep it private? Who in your life needs to hear what God has done for you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question takes the testimony of verses 22 and 26 and turns it on the student. The rescued sufferer cannot stay silent; gratitude overflows into telling. Ask students how readily they tell others what God has done.

Help the reluctant. Many keep God's work private out of shyness or a fear of seeming proud. But testimony is not boasting in ourselves; it is boasting in the Lord (Psalm 34:2), and it builds up others who are still in the dark.

Get concrete. Who specifically in their life needs to hear what God has done, a discouraged believer, a searching neighbor, a child? Encourage one act of testimony this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Testimony as the natural overflow of rescue and gratitude.
- Boasting in the Lord, not in ourselves (Psalm 34:2).
- Testimony as encouragement to others still struggling.
- The personal duty and joy of declaring what God has done.

Discussion Prompts

- Do you tend to testify to God's work or keep it private? Why?
- How is testimony different from boasting?
- Who in your life needs to hear what God has done for you?

Question 9

Student Question:

The psalm ends in worldwide triumph: "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord... future generations will be told about the Lord... they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it" (vv. 27–31). On the cross Jesus cried the opening of this psalm; with His last breath He said, "It is finished." How does Psalm 22 carry us from Christ's atoning death, through His vindication and resurrection, to the gathering of the nations into His church, and what does "he has done it" mean for how we are saved?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The psalm's final movement (vv. 27–31) sweeps outward to the whole world: "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord." The personal rescue becomes a global ingathering. This is the cross bearing its fruit among the nations.

Trace the line carefully. The atoning death comes first: Jesus bore our sins in His body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24), the righteous for the unrighteous (1 Peter 3:18). Isaiah 53 says He was pierced for our transgressions. The cry of forsakenness in verse 1 is the sound of that substitution, Christ taking the judgment our sin deserved so that we could be forgiven.

Then comes vindication. The psalm's sudden turn to praise presupposes deliverance; the New Testament names it as resurrection. God did not leave Him in the dust of death (a theme we will explore directly in Psalm 16). The risen Christ now reigns and gathers the nations. This is why the psalm can leap from a lonely cross to a worldwide congregation: the tomb is empty and the King is alive.

Dwell on the closing words, "he has done it" (v. 31). On the cross Jesus said, "It is finished" (John 19:30), the same note of completed work. Help students see that our salvation rests on something Christ has accomplished, not on something we must achieve. The work of atonement is done.

Then connect to how we receive that finished work, carefully and consistently with the gospel. We do not earn it; we respond to it. According to the New Testament, we hear the good news, believe in Jesus as Lord and Christ, repent, confess Him, and are baptized into Him for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:36–38; Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:27), and then we join the worldwide congregation of verse 27 in faithful praise. The finished work of Christ is applied to us as we obey the gospel and continue in Him.

Guard against two errors. Do not turn "he has done it" into a license that ignores the gospel's call to respond; and do not turn our response into a meritorious work that adds to the cross. Christ accomplished salvation; we receive it His appointed way.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The atoning, substitutionary death of Christ (Isaiah 53:5; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18; 2 Corinthians 5:21).
- The cry of forsakenness as the sound of Christ bearing our judgment.
- The resurrection and reign of Christ presupposed in the psalm's turn to triumph.
- The worldwide ingathering of the nations as the fruit of the cross.
- "It is finished": salvation accomplished by Christ, not achieved by us.
- Receiving the finished work through the gospel: faith, repentance, confession, baptism into Christ.
- Avoiding both cheap license and salvation by merit.

Discussion Prompts

- How does Psalm 22 move from a lonely cross to a worldwide family of worshipers?
- What does "it is finished" mean for how we are saved?
- How does the New Testament say we receive Christ's finished work?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole psalm, from the cry of forsakenness to the song of a worldwide family of worshipers. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through His own prayer in Psalm 22. What is the single truth from this psalm that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone asks students to trace the whole journey, from forsakenness to worldwide praise, and to name one way Jesus is forming them through His own prayer. Give them quiet to reflect.

Press for the personal. Because this is the prayer of our Savior, the formation here is intimate: to know that Christ has entered our worst, to bring Him our suffering, to remember His finished work, and to join the congregation that praises Him. Help each student locate where they most need to grow on that road.

Close by lifting their eyes to the risen Christ who reigns and gathers His people. The psalm refuses to end in the dark, and so should the lesson. Suffering is real, but in Christ it is never the last word.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ as the One who has entered and conquered our worst suffering.
- Bringing our own suffering to the Savior who carried the cross.
- Joining the worshiping congregation that the cross created.
- Hope grounded in the risen, reigning Christ who refuses to end in the dark.

Discussion Prompts

- Where on Psalm 22's road, the cry, the remembering, or the praise, do you most need to grow?
- What single truth from this psalm will you carry into this week?
- How does knowing Christ entered your worst suffering change how you face yours?