

Psalms, Teacher's Guide

Week 11: Waiting on the Lord with Hope

Psalm 130

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Psalm 130 is the fitting capstone of this study, one of the church's most beloved songs of penitence and hope, traditionally numbered among the 'songs of ascents.' What is doctrinally at stake is the nature of forgiveness and redemption, and the discipline of hope-filled waiting. The psalm moves from the depths, to an honest reckoning with sin, to the great 'but' of verse 4 ('with you there is forgiveness'), to patient waiting on God's word, to the assurance of 'plentiful redemption.' It gathers up the study's threads, lament, sin, forgiveness, trust, hope, into a single short psalm and points them all toward their fulfillment in Christ, 'in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses' (Ephesians 1:7).

Pay special attention to verse 4, 'with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared,' because it carries a profound truth about grace. It is forgiveness, not the threat of judgment, that produces true reverence and a holy life. This guards against two errors at once: the legalism that thinks fear of God comes mainly from dread of punishment, and the presumption that thinks grace makes holiness optional. Grace rightly understood produces grateful, reverent obedience, the response of someone amazed to be forgiven. Connect this to the whole New Testament logic that the grace of God trains us to renounce ungodliness (Titus 2:11–12).

Formationally, this psalm teaches what may be the hardest discipline of the Christian life: waiting on God with hope. Much of the believer's life is lived in the 'already and not yet,' between the cry from the depths and the full redemption to come. The watchman waiting for the morning is the perfect image, certain of the outcome, patient through the dark, anchored in God's word. As this is the final lesson, aim to send students home both grounded in the plentiful redemption secured in Christ and equipped to wait well, with the active, certain hope of those who know the morning is coming. It is a fitting place for the whole study to rest.

Question 1

Student Question:

The psalm opens, "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord! O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy" (vv. 1–2). What does it teach us that the psalmist's instinct in the lowest place is to cry upward to God, and what does this reveal about where the believer is meant to turn in seasons of deepest distress?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the direction of the cry. The psalmist is in 'the depths,' the lowest, most overwhelmed place, and his instinct is to cry upward, to God. This is the trained reflex of faith: when we hit bottom, we look up.

Contrast this with the natural human instinct. In the depths, people often turn anywhere but to God, to distraction, to numbing, to despair, to blaming. Some feel their very lowliness disqualifies them from approaching God. The psalmist teaches the opposite: the depths are precisely the place to cry out to the Lord.

Teach what the cry assumes about God. To cry to God from the depths is to believe that He hears, that He cares, and that He can help even here. The psalmist's plea for mercy assumes a God who is merciful. The cry itself is an act of faith.

Reassure the lowest in the room. There is no depth too deep for this cry. Jonah cried from the belly of the fish, 'out of the belly of Sheol' (Jonah 2:2), and was heard. No pit is beyond the reach of God's ear.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Crying upward to God as the trained reflex of faith in the depths.
- The natural instinct to turn anywhere but to God when low.
- The cry for mercy assuming a God who hears and is merciful.
- No depth too deep for God's ear (Jonah 2:2).
- The cry itself as an act of faith.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is crying to God our instinct in the depths a mark of faith?
- What does this cry assume to be true about God?
- Why do people so often turn anywhere but to God when they hit bottom?

Question 2

Student Question:

The 'depths' describe the lowest, most overwhelmed place a person can reach. When you have been in the depths, whether through grief, guilt, failure, or despair, where have you tended to turn first? What would it look like to make crying out to God your first instinct rather than your last resort?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question makes the previous truth personal. Ask students honestly where they have turned first in their lowest seasons. The answer reveals our functional faith, what we actually trust to save us.

Name the common alternatives without shaming: numbing distractions, frantic activity, isolation, despair, leaning wholly on other people. None is necessarily evil, but each becomes a problem when it replaces crying out to God.

Encourage the formation of a new reflex. Crying to God first is a habit that can be trained, often by practicing it in small troubles so it is ready in great ones. Encourage students to make God their first call, not their last resort.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Where we turn first revealing our functional faith.
- Common substitutes for crying out to God.
- Training the reflex of turning to God first.
- Practicing in small troubles to be ready in great ones.

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you tended to turn first in your lowest seasons?
- What does that reveal about what you really trust?
- How could you train the reflex of crying to God first?

Question 3

Student Question:

The psalmist asks, “If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?” (v. 3). What is he confessing about the human condition before a holy God, and why is this honest reckoning with our own sin a necessary step before we can truly appreciate the forgiveness he goes on to celebrate?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 3 is a sober reckoning: ‘If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities... who could stand?’ The psalmist confesses that if God kept a strict ledger of sins and held us to account, no one, not the psalmist, not anyone, could survive the audit. This is the universal human condition before a holy God (Romans 3:23).

Teach the necessity of this honesty. We cannot appreciate forgiveness until we grasp our need for it. The person who thinks they would do fine in God’s audit has no real use for grace. The depth of our need for mercy is the measure of our gratitude for it.

Note the word ‘stand.’ To stand is to be acquitted, to remain upright in the judgment (recall Psalm 1:5, ‘the wicked will not stand in the judgment’). The psalmist admits that on the basis of his own record, he could not stand. Neither can we.

Point ahead to the relief. This honest reckoning is not the end; it is the dark backdrop against which the 'but' of verse 4 shines. The psalmist faces the bad news squarely precisely so that the good news can land with full force.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The universal human condition before a holy God (Romans 3:23).
- No one able to 'stand' on the basis of their own record.
- Honest reckoning with sin as necessary to appreciate forgiveness.
- The depth of our need for mercy as the measure of our gratitude.
- The bad news as the backdrop that makes grace shine.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the psalmist confessing about all of us in verse 3?
- Why must we reckon honestly with our sin before we can treasure grace?
- Why can no one 'stand' on the basis of their own record?

Question 4

Student Question:

The psalmist faces honestly that if God kept a strict record of his sins, he could not stand. Do you tend to take your own sin seriously, or to minimize it and assume you would do fine in God's audit? How does an honest reckoning with your sin actually open the door to deeper gratitude rather than despair?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question presses the honesty of verse 3 into the student's heart. Ask whether they tend to take sin seriously or quietly assume they are basically good and would fare well in God's judgment.

Expose the comfortable lie of self-justification. Most of us instinctively grade ourselves on a curve, comparing ourselves to worse people and concluding we are fine. Verse 3 removes the curve: the standard is God's holiness, and by that standard none of us stands.

Show how this honesty opens the door to gratitude, not despair. Counterintuitively, the believer who takes their sin most seriously is often the most joyful, because they are most amazed by grace. Those who minimize their sin also minimize their Savior. The way up is down: honest reckoning leads to deep gratitude.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The temptation to minimize sin and grade ourselves on a curve.
- God's holiness, not comparison with others, as the standard.

- Honest reckoning with sin opening the door to gratitude, not despair.
- Those who minimize their sin minimizing their Savior.

Discussion Prompts

- Do you take your own sin seriously, or assume you would do fine in God's audit?
- How does grading ourselves against others deceive us?
- Why does taking sin seriously lead to deeper gratitude, not despair?

Question 5

Student Question:

The turning point of the psalm is verse 4: "But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared." It is striking that forgiveness, not judgment, is what leads people to fear (revere) God. Why does God's forgiveness produce reverence rather than carelessness, and what does this teach us about how grace actually shapes a holy life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 4 is the hinge and the heart of the psalm: 'But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.' The little word 'but' turns the whole psalm from the depths toward hope. With God, there is forgiveness, that is who He is and what He offers.

Dwell on the surprising logic: forgiveness leads to fear (reverence). We might expect the opposite, that forgiveness would make people careless, since they can always be pardoned. But the psalmist says God's forgiveness produces reverence. Explore why.

Explain the dynamic of grace. A God who merely punished would produce cringing dread or sullen rebellion, not reverent love. But a God who forgives, at great cost, wins the heart. The forgiven sinner does not think, 'Now I can sin freely'; they think, 'How can I grieve a God who has been so merciful to me?' Grace produces grateful, reverent obedience (Romans 2:4).

Connect to the whole New Testament. 'The grace of God has appeared... training us to renounce ungodliness' (Titus 2:11–12). Holiness grows not from the dread of punishment but from gratitude for grace. This is the engine of the transformed life, and it guards against both legalism and presumption.

Apply to the believer's walk. The way to grow in holiness is not to doubt our forgiveness in order to scare ourselves straight, but to drink more deeply of grace until reverent love crowds out our sin. The most forgiven hearts become the most devoted.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Verse 4 as the hinge: 'with you there is forgiveness.'
- Forgiveness producing reverence rather than carelessness.

- Grace, not dread of punishment, as the engine of holiness (Romans 2:4; Titus 2:11–12).
- Guarding against both legalism and presumption.
- The most forgiven hearts becoming the most devoted.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God’s forgiveness produce reverence rather than carelessness?
- What does this teach us about how grace shapes a holy life?
- How does growing in grace, rather than fear of punishment, change us?

Question 6

Student Question:

The psalmist describes waiting for the Lord “more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning” (v. 6), repeating the phrase as if to steady himself. In what area of life is your waiting on God wearing thin? What would change if you waited like a watchman who is certain the morning will come?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question takes up the watchman image of verse 6, repeated for emphasis. The watchman waits through the long night, certain the morning will come; he cannot hurry it, but he does not doubt it. Ask students where their own waiting is wearing thin.

Distinguish two kinds of waiting. Anxious waiting frets, doubts, and tries to force the outcome; it is exhausting and faithless. The watchman’s waiting is patient and certain; it rests in the sureness of the morning. The difference is not the length of the night but the confidence about the dawn.

Encourage the shift. Help students name what would change if they waited with the watchman’s certainty rather than anxious fretting, more peace, less striving, the ability to endure the dark without despairing. The morning is not in doubt; only its timing is hidden.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The watchman’s certain, patient waiting versus anxious fretting.
- Confidence about the dawn, not the length of the night, as the difference.
- Waiting that rests in God’s sureness rather than forcing outcomes.
- Enduring the dark without despair because the morning is certain.

Discussion Prompts

- Where is your waiting on God wearing thin?
- What is the difference between anxious waiting and the watchman’s waiting?
- What would change if you were certain the morning is coming?

Question 7

Student Question:

The psalmist says, “I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope” (v. 5); his waiting is anchored in God’s word. What is the difference between waiting that is anchored in God’s promises and mere passive waiting or wishful thinking, and why is hope in God’s word the key to waiting well?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 5 anchors the waiting: ‘in his word I hope.’ The psalmist’s hope is not vague optimism but confidence in what God has actually said and promised. His waiting has content; it is tethered to God’s word.

Distinguish anchored hope from wishful thinking. Wishful thinking hopes for an outcome it has no grounds to expect; biblical hope rests on the promises of a God who cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18). The believer waits not for a preferred outcome but for God to keep His word, which He certainly will.

Teach the practical role of Scripture in waiting. We wait well only when we are feeding on God’s promises, because the long night erodes a hope that is not anchored. The watchman scans the horizon; the believer fixes their eyes on what God has said. The word is what sustains hope through the dark.

Apply it concretely. Encourage students to identify the specific promises of God that speak to what they are waiting for, and to return to them when the waiting grows hard. Hope is fed by the word, not by the absence of difficulty.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Hope anchored in God’s word, not vague optimism.
- The difference between biblical hope and wishful thinking (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18).
- Waiting for God to keep His word rather than for a preferred outcome.
- Scripture as what sustains hope through the long night.
- Feeding on specific promises while we wait.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between hope anchored in God’s word and wishful thinking?
- Why is Scripture so essential to waiting well?
- What specific promise of God speaks to what you are waiting for?

Question 8

Student Question:

The psalmist moves from his own crying in the depths to urging the whole community, “O Israel, hope in the Lord!” (v. 7); his personal hope overflows into encouraging others. Who around you is in the depths right now and needs to be pointed toward the God of forgiveness and hope? How might your own experience of being lifted equip you to help them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question takes up verse 7, where the psalmist turns from his own experience to urge the whole community: ‘O Israel, hope in the Lord!’ Personal redemption overflows into encouraging others. The one who has been lifted reaches back to lift.

Encourage students to see their own journey through the depths as preparation to help others. The comfort we receive from God equips us to comfort others with the same comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3–4). Our experience of being forgiven and carried becomes a credential of compassion.

Get concrete. Ask students to name someone currently in the depths who needs to be pointed to the God of forgiveness and hope, and to consider one specific way to encourage them this week. Hope, like grief, is meant to be shared in the community of faith.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Personal hope overflowing into encouraging others (v. 7).
- Comfort received equipping us to comfort others (2 Corinthians 1:3–4).
- Our journey through the depths as preparation to help.
- Hope shared within the community of faith.

Discussion Prompts

- Who around you is in the depths and needs to be pointed to hope?
- How might your own experience equip you to help them?
- What is one way you could encourage someone who is waiting this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

The psalm ends in soaring confidence: “with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities” (vv. 7–8). How does this promise of ‘plentiful redemption’ from all our iniquities find its complete fulfillment in the redeeming work of Christ, and what does it mean for the believer who is still waiting that the decisive redemption has already been accomplished?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Bring the psalm, and the study, to its climax. Verses 7–8 ground the call to hope in God’s character and work: ‘with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.’ Note the word ‘plentiful,’ the redemption is abundant, more than enough, and it reaches ‘all’ our iniquities, not some.

Show the fulfillment in Christ. The redemption the psalmist hoped for is accomplished in Jesus: ‘In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace’ (Ephesians 1:7). What the psalmist awaited as a future hope, the believer receives as an accomplished fact. The blood of Christ is the ‘plentiful redemption’ in person, sufficient for all our iniquities, however deep the depths.

Teach the ‘already and not yet,’ which is the perfect note on which to end the study. The decisive redemption has already been accomplished at the cross and secured by the resurrection; in that sense we are redeemed now (Colossians 1:13–14). Yet we still wait for the full and final redemption, the redemption of our bodies and the end of all sin and death (Romans 8:23–25). The believer waits, but not in uncertainty; we wait for the completion of something already guaranteed.

Connect to how this redemption is received and held, consistent with the gospel. We enter Christ’s redemption by faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Him (the pattern taught throughout this study), and we ‘hope in the Lord’ by continuing faithfully, waiting like watchmen, until the morning comes. The redemption is plentiful enough to cover all our sin and sure enough to anchor all our waiting.

Draw the threads of the whole study together. We began in Psalm 1 with the two ways and the blessed life rooted in God; we learned to lament, to follow the suffering and risen Christ, to rest in resurrection hope, to be forgiven, to trust God amid injustice, to hope when downcast, to repent, to wait when the righteous struggle, and to remember God’s steadfast love. Psalm 130 gathers it all: from the depths we cry, in our sin we find forgiveness, on God’s word we hope, and toward plentiful redemption in Christ we wait. The whole journey of the believer is here in eight verses.

End on the morning. The watchman’s night always ends in dawn. For the believer, the morning is the return of Christ and the full redemption He brings, the day with no more night (Revelation 22:5). We wait, but the sun is already rising; the resurrection of Jesus is the first light of that morning. Send the class home waiting with hope.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- ‘Plentiful redemption’ reaching all our iniquities, fulfilled in Christ’s blood (Ephesians 1:7).
- The redemption the psalmist hoped for received by the believer as accomplished fact.
- The ‘already and not yet’: redeemed now, awaiting full redemption (Colossians 1:13–14; Romans 8:23–25).
- Entering and keeping this redemption through the gospel and faithful waiting.

- Psalm 130 gathering the whole study's themes: depths, sin, forgiveness, hope, redemption.
- The resurrection of Christ as the first light of the coming morning (Revelation 22:5).

Discussion Prompts

- How does 'plentiful redemption' find its fulfillment in Christ?
- What does it mean to wait for a redemption that is already accomplished?
- How does Psalm 130 gather up the whole journey of these eleven weeks?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back not only across this psalm but across our whole study in the Psalms, through lament, suffering, trust, forgiveness, doubt, gratitude, and hope. Name one specific way you sense Jesus has been forming you through these psalms. What is the single truth, from Psalm 130 and from the study as a whole, that you most need to carry forward?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This final capstone asks students to look back not only across Psalm 130 but across the entire study, and to name one way Jesus has been forming them through the Psalms. Give generous quiet; this is the closing reflection of eleven weeks.

Press toward the concrete and the lasting. Ask not merely what they have learned but how they have changed, what they now do differently with their lament, their guilt, their waiting, their gratitude. The aim of the whole study has been formation, becoming more like Christ, not merely the accumulation of knowledge.

Close the study by lifting their eyes one last time to Christ, with whom there is forgiveness and in whom is plentiful redemption. The Psalms have taught us to bring our whole inner life to God, honestly and as people who read these ancient songs through Jesus. Send the class out as watchmen who know the morning is coming, waiting on the Lord with hope.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spiritual formation across the whole study as the goal, not mere knowledge.
- Bringing the whole inner life to God, read through Christ.
- Forgiveness and plentiful redemption in Christ as the study's resting place.
- Living as watchmen who wait on the Lord with hope.

Discussion Prompts

- How has Jesus been forming you through this study in the Psalms?
- What single truth, from Psalm 130 and the whole study, will you carry forward?
- What will you now do differently with your lament, your guilt, and your waiting?