

## SPECIAL LESSON

### Psalm 22: Clinging to Hope

#### Bible Study Preparation and Materials Needed:

Reflecting on: Psalm 22 (OSB 21) - Clinging to Hope

For the Lesson: Orthodox Study Bible or Holy Bible: Armenian Church Edition

*Recommended Orthodox Study Bible* [HERE](#).

*Recommended Holy Bible: Armenian Church Edition* [HERE](#).

#### *Optional Practice*

If time permits, begin or conclude this Bible study with an antiphonal Psalm reading. Have students read the psalm aloud in two groups, line by line. Encourage them to hear David's emotion, allowing it to become their own prayer.

#### Memory Verse:

**O God, my God, hear me; why have You forsaken me?  
The words of my transgressions are far from my salvation.**

**- Psalm 22:2 (OSB 23:2)**

## **Psalm 22 (OSB 23)**

*1 For the End; concerning help in the morning; a psalm by David.*

*2 O God, my God, hear me; why have You forsaken me?*

*The words of my transgressions are far from my salvation.*

*3 O my God, I will cry out by day, but You will not hear me;*

*And by night, but not for a lack of understanding in me.*

*4 But You dwell among the saints, O praise of Israel.*

*5 Our fathers hoped in You;*

*They hoped in You, and You delivered them.*

*6 They cried out to You and were saved;*

*They hoped in You and were not ashamed.*

*7 But I am a worm, and not a man;*

*A reproach of man and despised by the people.*

*8 All who see me mock me;*

*They speak with their lips and shake their head,*

*9 Saying, "He hoped in the Lord, let Him rescue him;*

*Let Him save him since He delights in him."*

*10 For You are He who drew me from the womb,*

*My hope from my mother's breasts;*

*11 I was cast upon You from the womb,*

*From my mother's womb You are my God.*

*12 Do not stand off from me, for affliction is near;*

*There is no one to help.*

*13 Many young bulls surrounded me;*

*Fat bulls encircled me.*

*14 They opened their mouths against me*

*Like a raging and roaring lion.*

*15 I am poured out like water,*

*And all my bones are shattered;*

*My heart is like wax, melting into my stomach.*

*16 My strength is dried up like an earthen vessel;*

*My tongue cleaves to my throat;*

*And You led me into the dust of death.*

*17 For many dogs surrounded me;*

*An assembly of evildoers enclosed me;*

*They pierced my hands and my feet.*

*18 I numbered all my bones,*

*And they look and stare at me.*

*19 They divided my garments among themselves,*

*And for my clothing they cast lots.*

*20 But You, O Lord, do not remove Your help from me;*

*Attend to my aid.*

*21 Deliver my soul from the sword*

*And my only-begotten from the hand of the dog;*

*22 Save me from the lion's mouth,*

*My humiliation from the horns of the unicorns.*

*23 I will declare Your name to my brethren;*

*In the midst of the church I will sing to You.*

*24 You who fear the Lord, praise Him.*

*All you seed of Jacob, glorify Him;*

*Fear Him, all you seed of Israel.*

*25 For He has not despised nor scorned the beggar's supplication,*

*Nor has He turned away His face from me;*

*And when I cried out to Him, He heard me.*

*26 My praise is from You in the great church;*

*I will pay my vows before those who fear Him.*

*27 The poor shall eat and be well-filled,*

*And those who seek Him will praise the Lord;*

*Their hearts will live unto ages of ages.*

*28 All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord;*

*And all families of the Gentiles shall worship before You,*

*29 For the kingdom is the Lord's;*

*And He is the Master of the Gentiles.*

*30 All the prosperous of the earth ate and worshiped;*

*All going down into the earth shall bow down before Him,*

*And my soul lives with Him.*

*31 And my seed shall serve Him;*

*The coming generation shall be told of the Lord,*

*32 And they will declare His righteousness*

*To a people who will be born, because the Lord made them.*

## Bible Study Lesson

### Open with prayer:

Իմաստութիւն Յօր՝ Յիսուս, տո՛ւր ինձ իմաստութիւն, զբարիս խորհել եւ խօսել եւ գործել առաջի Քո՝ յամենայն ժամ. ի չար խորհրդոց, ի բանից եւ ի գործոց փրկեա՛ զիս. եւ ողորմեա՛ Քո արարածոց եւ ինձ բազմամեղիս: Ամէն

Eemasdootyoon Hor Heesoos, door eents eemasdootyoon uzparees khorel yev khosel yev kordz arachi ko hamenayn jham. Ee char khorhrtos, ee paneets yev kordzots prgya zees yev voghormya ko araradzots eents pazmameghees. Amen.

Wisdom of the Father, O Jesus, grant to me the wisdom to think, speak, and do that which is good in Your sight. Save me from all evil and distracting thoughts, words, and deeds. Have mercy upon your creatures and upon me, a great sinner. Amen.

## A Reflection on Psalm 22 (Orthodox Bible Psalm 21): Clinging to Hope

Have you ever felt that life has pushed you to the edge? When tragedy strikes without warning. When people you trusted betray you. When your whole world collapses and you can't even find God in the rubble. You don't feel faithful, you feel abandoned. You don't feel hopeful, you feel desperate. But somehow, with whatever strength you have left, you keep clinging.

In moments when we feel like God has walked away, when our prayers seem to bounce off empty air, when the darkness is so thick we can't see our own hands, Psalm 22 (Orthodox Bible Psalm 21) speaks for us. This psalm is not about feeling good about God; it's about holding onto God when you feel nothing at all. David doesn't start with answers; he begins with the most heartbreaking question ever asked. But he doesn't end there. Through raw anguish and brutal honesty, he shows us what it looks like clinging to hope when hope feels impossible.

This psalm permits us to feel abandoned without being abandoned. It reminds us that faith isn't about having all the answers, yet sometimes it is just about not letting go.

Let's be real. Sometimes we feel like God is absent. We all have moments like this. We pray and hear nothing. We look for signs and see darkness. We beg for help and feel ignored. In those moments, we're tempted to believe that God has forgotten us, or worse, that He was never there at all.

But David shows us something different. Even when God feels absent, David can't bring himself to walk away. He's angry, confused, desperate, but he's still talking to God. His faith is hanging by a thread, but that thread won't break.

### My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?

These are the hardest words in the Bible. David still calls God "my God" even while feeling completely abandoned. That's not a contradiction — that's clinging. When you feel like God has left you, but you still can't bring yourself to leave Him, you're living in the tension of Psalm 22.

*"My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Why are You so far from my salvation, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; And in the night season, and am not silent."* (verses 2-3)

Here's what's powerful about this: David's crisis isn't a crisis of faith. It's actually an expression of faith. When you're at your absolute lowest and you still cry out to God, you're saying, "I still believe You exist. I still believe You care. Even though everything feels hopeless." You don't argue with someone you think isn't there.

The Orthodox Church understands this kind of prayer. They don't try to fix our questions or shame us for our doubts. St. Silouan the Athonite wrote, *"Keep your mind in hell, and despair not."* He knew that sometimes we have to pray from the darkest places without feeling any comfort, trusting that God hears us even when we can't sense His presence.

God isn't threatened by your desperation. He's not disappointed when you can't understand His ways. He's listening to your heart cry, even when it feels like He's silent.

**Q:** *Have you ever felt like God had abandoned you? What did that feel like, and how did you handle it?*

## Exhaustion and Unanswered Prayer

*"I Cry... But You Do Not Hear; O my God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent."* (verse 3)

David describes the exhaustion of unanswered prayer. He's crying out around the clock, morning prayers, midnight tears, but heaven seems sealed shut. Yet notice what he doesn't do: he doesn't stop praying. Even when it feels pointless, even when God seems deaf to his cries, David continues to talk to Him.

This is what desperation looks like when it's wrapped in faith. David isn't praying because he feels like it or because it's working. He's praying because he literally doesn't know what else to do. Prayer has become his life-line, not his choice.

But then something shifts. Right in the middle of his complaint, David pauses...

## The Tone Change

*"But You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted, and You delivered them. They cried to You, and were delivered; they trusted in You, and were not ashamed."* (verses 4-6)

This is memory as worship. When present reality feels hopeless, David reaches back into the past to find reasons to hope. He's essentially saying, "I don't understand what's happening to me, but I still know who You are." He begins to remember how God helped previous generations, how He delivered their ancestors when they trusted Him.

St. Basil the Great taught that *"remembering God's past faithfulness nourishes the soul during times of famine."* David is feeding his faith with the testimony of generations who trusted God and weren't disappointed.

**Q:** *What are some ways God has been faithful in your life or your family's life that you can remember when times get hard?*

## But I Am a Worm

*"But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see me ridicule me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, 'He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue him; let Him deliver him, since he delights in Him!'"* (verses 7-9)

David hits rock bottom emotionally. He doesn't just feel bad, he feels inhuman. He's being mocked for his faith, which makes his suffering even more isolating. It's one thing to suffer; it's another thing to be ridiculed for trusting God while you suffer.

When people make fun of your faith during your lowest moments, it can feel like salt in an open wound. David's enemies are basically saying, "If God loves you so much, where is He now?" That question cuts deep because secretly, David is wondering the same thing.

But notice that even in this dark moment, David doesn't curse God or abandon his faith. He brings his brokenness to God instead of running from Him. He lets God see him at his worst, trusting that God can handle his raw honesty.

St. John of the Cross wrote about *"the dark night of the soul"*, those seasons when God feels absent and our faith feels dead. However, he taught that these dark nights often precede our most significant spiritual breakthroughs. Sometimes, God allows us to feel completely broken so that we can discover His love doesn't depend on our strength.

**Q:** *Have you ever been mocked or questioned for your faith during a difficult time? How did that affect you?*

## My Heart Is Like Wax

*“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within me. My strength is dried up like a shard of clay, and my tongue clings to my jaws; You have brought me to the dust of death.” (verses 15-16)*

David uses physical imagery to describe complete emotional and spiritual collapse. He feels like he’s literally falling apart, melting, disjointed, dried up. This isn’t poetic exaggeration; this is what trauma does to us. It affects our bodies, our emotions, our entire sense of self.

When we’re in crisis, we don’t just think differently, we feel different physically. Anxiety affects our breathing. Grief affects our appetite. Fear affects our sleep. David acknowledges that his suffering is total; body, mind, and spirit.

But even in this description of a complete breakdown, David is still talking to God. He’s not pretending to be fine. He’s not trying to be spiritually impressive. He’s showing God his wounds and trusting that God can handle seeing him broken.

This brutal honesty in prayer is, in fact, faith. It says, *“God, I trust you enough to let you see me like this. I believe you love me even when I’m falling apart.”*

**Q:** *How does emotional pain affect you physically? Do you feel comfortable bringing that kind of honesty to God?*

## The Lord Has Heard

Then, something changes. David doesn’t say his circumstances have changed. He doesn’t say God answered his prayers the way he wanted. But suddenly he’s talking about praise and worship:

*“From You comes my praise in the great assembly; I will pay my vows before those who fear Him. The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek Him will praise the Lord. Let your heart live forever!” (verse 25)*

This is the mystery of clinging faith. Somewhere in the middle of his suffering, David makes a choice. He decides to trust God’s heart even when he can’t understand God’s ways. He chooses to believe that his story isn’t over, that God isn’t finished with him, that this darkness won’t last forever.

St. Isaac the Syrian taught, *“When you cannot find consolation in the scriptures, be patient until you do; for you will surely find it, because God’s Word never returns empty.”* David embodies this patience that chooses hope over despair.

David begins to think beyond his own pain. He begins to see how his suffering might serve others, how his story of clinging to hope might encourage people who are also struggling. This is faith that has been refined by fire, it’s no longer self-centered; it’s focused on God’s greater purposes.

## The Psalm’s Conclusion

The psalm ends with an incredible vision: *“All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You. For the kingdom is the Lord’s, and He rules over the nations.” (verses 28-29)*

David moves from *“My God, why have You forsaken me?”* to seeing God’s kingdom covering the earth. This is what happens when we cling to hope through our darkest moments. Our perspective expands. We start to see our suffering as part of God’s bigger story of redemption.

**Q:** *How can our struggles help other people? Have you ever been inspired by someone else’s story of overcoming difficult times?*

## The Cross Connection

For Christians, this psalm assumes even greater significance because we know that Jesus prayed these very words on the cross, and other verses in the psalm are seen at His crucifixion. Verse 2 is quoted in Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34; verse 9 is referenced in Matthew 27:43; and verse 19 is mentioned in Matthew 27:35.

Jesus prays this psalm, which foretold the very details of the Crucifixion. Taken without the rest of the psalm, His cry of “*Why have You forsaken me?*” could be misinterpreted as a cry of despair. However, since He took on our human nature, Jesus experiences our alienation from God in His humanity, knowing our suffering and distress, yet He does not despair. He speaks these words in the name of humanity, completely identifying with us in our condition, for in His divinity, the Father never forsakes him.

When we pray Psalm 22, we cling to hope in our darkest moments. We’re participating in the same faith that carried David through his despair and Christ on the cross to resurrection.

**Q:** *How does knowing that Jesus spoke these words (Ps. 22:2) on the cross for all humanity change how you think about your own struggles?*

Psalm 22 teaches us that faith isn’t about never feeling abandoned. It’s about holding onto God even when He feels absent. It shows us that clinging to hope isn’t about positive thinking or pretending everything is fine. It’s about refusing to let go of God when letting go would be the easier choice.

The most powerful faith isn’t the kind that never gets tested. It’s the one that gets pushed to the breaking point but doesn’t break. It’s the faith that cries, “*Why have You forsaken me?*” (v. 1) and still ends with “*All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord*” (v. 28). It’s the faith that hangs by a thread but discovers that thread is stronger than steel.

When you feel like you’re at the end of your rope, remember that rope is connected to the throne of God. And He will never let you fall.

## Reflection Questions

1. *What’s the difference between losing your faith and feeling like you’ve lost your faith?*
2. *How can remembering God’s past faithfulness help us through present struggles?*
3. *Why do you think it’s essential to be completely honest with God about how we feel?*
4. *What does it mean to “cling to hope” when hope feels impossible?*
5. *How might our struggles serve God’s purposes beyond just our own healing?*

### Close with prayer:

Պահապան ամենայնի Քրիստոս, աջ Քո հովանի լիցի ի վերայ իմ, ի տուէ եւ ի գիշերի, ի նստիլ ի տան, ի գնալ ի ճանապարհ, ի ննջել եւ ի յառնել, զի մի երբեք սասանեցայց եւ ողորմեա՛ Քո արարածոց եւ ինձ բազմամեղիս: Ամէն

Bahaban amenayn Kreesdos, ach Ko hovanee leetsee ee vera eem; ee dveh yev ee keesheree, ee nsdeel ee dan, ee knal ee janabarh, ee nunchel yev ee harnel, zee mee yerpek sasanetsayts yev voghormya Ko araradzots yev eents pazmamyghees. Amen.

O Christ, guardian of all, let Your right hand guard and shelter me, by day and by night, at home and abroad, in sleeping and in waking, that I may never stumble. Have mercy upon Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner. Amen.