Bible Studies for Life
Commentary

Recognize God’s Presence

Focal Passages:
Psalm 31:7-10, 14-16, 21-24

Background Passage:
Psalm 31:1-24

Lesson Outline:
- Rejoice in God’s Faithfulness (Ps. 31:7-10)
- Trust in God’s Power (Ps. 31:14-16)
- Express Your Love for God (Ps. 31:21-24)

What This Lesson Is About:
This lesson is about the presence of a powerful and faithful God, whom we can trust even in the midst of difficult circumstances.

Why This Lesson Is Important:
It is not uncommon for people to wonder where God is when they are grieving. Any loss can bring pain and grief, making people feel either alone or wondering if God has left them alone. This study underscores the continuous presence of God at all times, both good times and bad. Adults need to discover that God is present with them in their grief.

How This Lesson Can Impact Your Life:
This lesson can help you acknowledge God’s constant presence in spite of circumstances and feelings.

Spiritual Preparation Through Personal Bible Study
“Footprints in the Sand” has been a popular literary piece since the mid-twentieth century. Differing versions have been published and sold as art, posters, and even music. The brief story concerns a dream the author had of two sets of footprints representing the author’s walk with God through life. The author expressed disappointment when only one set of footprints was visible in times of sorrow and trouble. The divine explanation was that those were not the author’s single footprints but pictured the times when the Lord carried the author through difficult days. Our feelings can mislead us to believe God abandons us in our times of sorrow, but God assures us in His Word that He will never leave or forsake His children.

In Psalm 31 David described how God’s faithfulness supported him through a particularly difficult time in his life. He expressed his joy, trust, and love for God’s faithful presence and help. In our study for this week we will learn how we too can count on God’s faithful love to carry us through our most difficult trials. Understanding and believing God’s promises brings peace of mind as we face the many challenges of life.
Rejoice in God’s Faithfulness
Psalm 31:7-10

7 I will rejoice and be glad in Your faithful love because You have seen my affliction. You have known the troubles of my life
8 and have not handed me over to the enemy. You have set my feet in a spacious place.
9 Be gracious to me, LORD, because I am in distress; my eyes are worn out from angry sorrow—my whole being as well.
10 Indeed, my life is consumed with grief and my years with groaning; my strength has failed because of my sinfulness, and my bones waste away.

The life of David as revealed in the Old Testament included many encounters with danger and stress. As a young shepherd he protected his sheep from wild animals. As a young man he fought and won against the Philistine giant Goliath. In Saul’s court he was the object of Saul’s murderous paranoia. He fought in numerous battles against Israel’s enemies and faced a rebellion led by his son Absalom. In some of David’s experiences he was the innocent victim, but in others sinful choices contributed to his crises. David expressed his petitions for help in the Psalms, where his name appears more than any other author. Psalm 31 is one of the enduring testimonies of David’s trust in God during a difficult time in his life. The specific time and event are not revealed, but he spoke of enemies who were trying to destroy him. David turned to the Lord as his rock and refuge in those difficult days.

Despite his difficulties—shown in such words as affliction, troubles, distress, angry sorrow, consumed with grief, and groaning—David was able to rejoice and be glad. When he expressed his joy, the threat had not been removed. David expressed faith and believed the Lord would help him. We too can confidently thank the Lord for what He will do to help us in our times of need. Our confidence, like David’s, should rest on God’s promises and His proven history of helping us in previous times of need. David specifically mentioned the Lord’s faithful love. The Hebrew word chesed (faithful love) conveys important truths related to God’s relationship with His chosen people. The word describes God’s act of salvation when He delivered the nation from Egyptian slavery (Ex. 15:13). Faithful love is connected to God’s covenant with His people revealed through Moses (Deut. 7:9,12). The word also describes God’s willingness to forgive those who have sinned and repent (Num. 14:18-19). David used the word to describe God’s faithfulness to help him in his time of need.

David knew the Lord had seen his affliction and knew his troubles. A wonderful attribute of God to remember in our times of trouble is His omniscience. We do not have to inform Him of our needs. He knows all about us and nothing escapes His notice. He is not a passive onlooker. His knowledge couples with love and He responds to us even when we do not know what to ask for. The Hebrew word translated affliction was used...
by Old Testament authors to describe serious instances of suffering. The word describes the predicament of a desperate Hagar who ran from Sarah after conceiving a child by Abraham (Gen. 16:11). It was used by the Lord of the suffering of His people while slaves in Egypt (Ex. 3:7). The Hebrew word is used a dozen times in Job; four specifically describe his ordeals (10:15; 30:16,27; 36:21). The Hebrew noun translated troubles is used to describe Peninnah when ridiculing childless Hannah (1 Sam. 1:6). The word is also used of suffering brought on by disobedience to the Lord (2 Chron. 20:9). God’s blessings of help are not just for the obedient but also for those who turn to Him in repentance. Psalm 31:10 indicates the suffering of David probably came from a time of disobedience in his life.

In verse 8 David rejoiced in God’s protection. God had not handed him over to the enemy. We, like David, face enemies in the physical and spiritual realms. As a young pastor, I made a member of my church angry over a trivial matter. He forced a called business meeting to demand my resignation. His son even warned me that he might physically attack me. I felt the stress leading up to the service that day. I preached to a standing room only crowd about the importance of loving one another. When the service ended and the business meeting began, I explained the events. He then got up and meekly backed away from this threat to call for my resignation. I am confident it was not my preaching but the power of God’s Spirit that shielded me from his threats that day. Whether it is the threat of people or Satan, God is able to deliver us from our enemies. When David said the Lord set his feet in a spacious place, he used imagery of freedom. Problems and worry bind us and restrict us. God’s deliverance looses the bonds of fear and releases us from the confinement of anxiety.

“Be gracious to me” prepares us for the admission of sin in verse 10. Grace is the basis for David’s plea for help. His actions have not warranted deliverance, but He appealed to the undeserved mercy of God. The mercy of God is the mysterious attribute of God that we as sinners cling to. His grace is amazing because it is undeserved. God’s holiness and righteousness demand payment for sin. God’s love and mercy respond to the helpless state of the sinner. Grace and justice met at the cross where Jesus paid the price for our sins.

David mentioned a total exhaustion of mind, body, and spirit due to his grief. (See this lesson’s word study on “grief.”) Stress wearies us more than physical labor. Fear and worry steal precious time and strength when we face an uncertain future. We are tired and in need of sleep, but worries prevent us from resting. Many seek that sleep through medications, but without the Lord we only treat the symptoms of our troubles rather than the causes.

David referred to his sinfulness as the cause of his difficulties. Much of the suffering we face arises as the result of our own sinfulness. Recovery begins when we confess our sin and ask for God’s forgiveness. God faithfully stands prepared to help us but He also faithfully calls on us to repent.

Trust in God’s Power
Psalm 31:14-16
14 But I trust in You, LORD;  
I say, “You are my God.”

15 The course of my life is in Your power;  
deliver me from the power of my enemies  
and from my persecutors.

16 Show Your favor to Your servant;  
save me by Your faithful love.

David expressed confidence and faith in God’s ability and willingness to help him. The Hebrew word translated trust (batach) is also found in the famous imperative of Proverbs 3:5 where the author commands total reliance upon the Lord. The Lord was David’s God. Lord (Yahweh) translates the personal and covenant name of Israel’s God. David’s faith was based upon the promises of the Lord with whom he had a relationship. Turning to the Lord for deliverance was not a last resort for David. We have all heard people say in crisis, “I guess there’s nothing else we can do but pray.” Many exhaust other possible sources of help and only turn to the Lord when those fail. We must learn to turn to Him first.

Everyone turns to someone or something in their times of need. Some people put their trust in themselves. They are proud of their self-reliance and believe they can work through any problem on their own. No one, however, is wise enough or strong enough to solve the many challenges of life. Some put their trust in others. They become absolutely dependent upon a mate, child, or friend. People are fragile, limited, and sometimes unreliable. Those who put their ultimate trust in others are destined for disappointment. Some put their trust in money or possessions. They fail to recognize that wealth cannot purchase salvation, love, respect, or countless other treasures.

Putting our absolute trust in God requires that we patiently wait on Him. As we saw in the previous lesson concerning Jesus and Lazarus, the Lord sometimes waits longer than we would prefer before He responds to our requests. Faith requires that we not give up on Him, but trust that He knows and will respond at the right time. When we trust God above all others, we will not abandon faith in Him when He chooses not to meet our requests.

Trusting in God ultimately means trusting His Word. The Bible provides the road map for those who trust God. Our acceptance of His laws requires that we reject all other desires that conflict with them. The lusts of the sinful nature, the allure of the world, and the lies of Satan are rejected by faithful believers who embrace the truth of divine revelation. Trusting God means we will not be led astray by false doctrine or sinful desires.

David understood the biblical doctrine of the sovereignty of God when he said, “The course of my life is in Your power.” The Hebrew word translated course (eth) literally refers to “times” or “seasons.” The word occurs in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 of the many seasons and activities of life. David knew the Lord was in control of the events of his life. Nothing could happen to him without God’s permission. David’s enemies and persecutors were no match for his Lord. I sometimes use a jigsaw puzzle to illustrate the concept of God’s plan for the believer’s life. Puzzles do not begin with pieces but as whole pictures. The picture is then cut into pieces and mixed together to create a
challenge for those who would reassemble them in the correct order. Occasionally the person working on the puzzle can become frustrated with a piece that doesn’t seem to fit any other piece. The person knows however that it does fit because it was originally a part of the whole. In the same way, God has a plan for our lives as believers. Each day He gives us another piece. It may not seem to fit, but we know it does because it is a part of His divine plan. He is not only the planner but He is vitally involved in every part of our lives. We are never alone and we know He will never leave or forsake those who turn to Him for help (Deut. 31:6).

We are also confident that God’s power is greater than any challenges we may face. Moses sent 12 spies into the promised land before invading (Num. 13:1-33). All of the spies saw the fortified cities, the well-equipped armies, and the large inhabitants. Ten of the spies gave a bad report and urged Israel not to invade. They only saw the power of their enemies. Joshua and Caleb saw the same enemies, but knew those enemies were powerless to resist the nation who trusted in God. Faith focuses on the power of God and not the power of our opposition.

**Express Your Love for God**

*Psalm 31:21-24*

21 May the LORD be praised,
for He has wonderfully shown His faithful love to me
in a city under siege.

22 In my alarm I had said,
“ I am cut off from Your sight.”
But You heard the sound of my pleading
when I cried to You for help.

23 Love the LORD, all His faithful ones.
The LORD protects the loyal,
but fully repays the arrogant.

24 Be strong and courageous,
all you who put your hope in the LORD.

In the final verses of Psalm 31, David expressed praise to the Lord and called upon believers to love and put their hope in Him. In verse 21, David praised the Lord once again for His faithful love (*chesed*, see vv. 7,16). Wonderfully shown translates a Hebrew verb (*pala*) that means “to be surpassing, to be extraordinary.” The word is used over 80 times in the Old Testament. Whether translated as a verb or noun, it never refers to the actions or deeds of men but always describes a divine action or that which would require divine powers to accomplish. It was used of God’s miracles in Egypt to deliver His people (Ex. 3:20; 34:10) and of the destruction of the walls of Jericho (Josh. 3:5). David’s use of this word indicated that only the Lord could have secured his deliverance from the threats of his enemies.

The phrase **city under siege** may be used literally of David’s situation or may be used symbolically of his time of distress. Ancient cities used walls or natural fortifications to protect the inhabitants within from attacks. The strategy was to hold on until help from outside could arrive. The Lord arrived for David when pressured by his enemies and
delivered him. We too can have confidence that the Lord will come to our aid when troubles or enemies besiege us.

In verse 22, David admitted to a period of **alarm** when he wondered if the Lord saw his plight or heard his cries for help. Panic is an extreme form of fear that we feel when we are threatened by seemingly hopeless odds. Fear is the opposite of faith. Panic is what we feel when we forget about the promises of God and His faithfulness to us in the past. We may feel alone as believers, but we never are. God has promised never to leave or forsake His children in their times of need (Heb. 13:5).

In verse 23, David commanded that we **love the Lord**. According to God’s Word, love is not simply an emotion of attraction or desire. Love is an act of the will and a choice we make. Love for God is always demonstrated by obedience to His commands (1 John 5:2-3). No one can be said to love God when disobeying His will (4:20). Loving God in times of grief implies that we trust Him and will not turn away from Him even when we do not understand His will. David trusted in God’s covenant love, and he responded with love. We love God because He first loved us (v. 19). As Christians we should never doubt His love, because He demonstrated His love for us by sending His Son to die on the cross for our sins (John 3:16).

David spoke specifically to the community of believers when he addressed His **faithful ones** and those who were **loyal**. Those who desire the salvation of the Lord must call upon Him in faith and repent of their sins. When believers look to God for help, they should first examine their lives to determine if they are living obediently to His will. David confessed his sins (Ps. 31:9-10) then called upon the Lord for mercy (vv. 15-16). Trials and grief should cause us to examine our lives for unconfessed sin. These difficult experiences can be times of purification and renewal of commitment to God’s will for our lives.

**The arrogant** should not expect help from the Lord. Instead, they will be **fully** repaid for their sinful attitudes. Many seem to believe God exists to help us regardless of our relationship with Him. God’s promise of help is for the repentant sinner and the faithful believer who submit to God’s will for their lives. Humility is essential if we would find God’s help in our times of need.

David called upon believers in crisis to **be strong and courageous**. There are many different kinds of courage believers can exhibit based upon the circumstances. There is the courage of the believer who stands firm against persecutors who threaten or mock. There is the courage of a faithful caregiver who daily ministers to the physical, emotional, and/or spiritual needs of one who is sick or disabled. There is the courage of the husband or wife abandoned and betrayed by an unfaithful spouse. There is the courage of the sufferer who contends with a disease that afflicts him or her daily. There is the bravery of the parent who suffers the rejection or rebellious behavior of a prodigal child. There is the courage of the wife who carries on with life after losing her husband of many years. Faithful suffering is not for the faint of heart. Each deserves the title of “hero” as they battle weariness, sorrow, and the daily temptation to give up.

David’s final admonition is to “**put your hope in the Lord.**” **Hope** as used in the Scriptures is never uncertain, but the confident expectation that God will fulfill His
promises. God’s hope never disappoints (Rom. 5:5). His promises are sure and His love never fails. No one can snatch us out of His hand and nothing can separate us from the love of God for us in Christ Jesus (8:35-39). Have you been called upon to suffer? You are in great company. God’s greatest saints have been great sufferers. Each emerged from trials with greater faith than when the trials began. Each provides a story of God’s love and faithfulness intended to inspire others in their times of difficulty. When our turns come, let us demonstrate our faith in God who delivers us by His power and love.

**Biblical Truths of This Lesson in Focus**
- We can rejoice in God’s faithfulness regardless of the circumstances and challenges we face.
- We can trust in God’s power no matter how desperate our situation.
- We can show love for God as a testimony of our faith and hope in Him despite our difficulties.

**Word Study: Grief (v. 10)**
“Grief” (Hebrew, yagon) is used in the Old Testament to describe the aftermath of suffering and loss. The word first occurs in Genesis 42:38. Joseph, unrecognized by his brothers, as a ruler in Egypt commanded they return with their youngest brother Benjamin. Jacob, contemplating the loss of Benjamin after previously losing Joseph, described the prospect of a grief that would take him to the grave. Isaiah 35:10 used the word to describe a future day of salvation for Israel when their grief would be replaced with rejoicing.

Grief in the Book of Psalms (13:2; 107:39; 116:3) refers to the inevitable sorrows and difficulties of life that ultimately came from the sin of Adam and Eve. Though not using the Hebrew word, the New Testament, like Isaiah 35:10, predicts a future day of salvation when grief will no longer plague those who are saved (Rev. 21:3-4).