

DEVOTIONAL ON THE BOOK OF PSALMS



**PSALMS FOR WHEN
YOU'RE STRESSED**

**A SEVEN DAY DEVOTIONAL FOR WHEN
YOU FEEL STRESSED OUT**

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE BETTER:

AS YOU READ EACH PASSAGE, DO THE FOLLOWING:

ASK– God to connect with you in this moment. In prayer, start by slowing down and inviting God to help you understand what this passage means for your life. Clear your mind of all distractions and simply focus on what God wants to accomplish in this moment.

READ– the selected section of Scripture slowly. At first, read the whole passage while taking notes of the words and phrases that stick out to you. Next, read it a second time, pausing at the parts that stick out to you.

REFLECT– on what grabs you. What connections do you see at this point in your life? How might God be speaking to you through these words? Imagine you're living in the time of Jesus. What would be your reaction to this passage? What does it mean for you today?

RESPOND– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what resonated with you in two ways: individually and with your group.

day 1 - from stress to rest

READ: Psalm 20

When I was a child, there was a popular after-school television show called *Goosebumps* that aired on Nickelodeon. It was sort of like *American Horror Story* for seven-year-olds. I used to watch it while hiding behind sofa pillows, poking my eyes through a crack in the cushions. There was one eerie episode that made a lasting impression on me. On the screen, as a child was sliding into bed, the disembodied hand of a skeleton grasped the kid's ankle. Not cool, Nickelodeon! This scene shook me to my core. I don't even know what happened next because I scrambled away from the television as if the skeleton was going to leap from the screen.

That night as I was crawling into bed, the scene reignited in my imagination. The shock made me cower away from my covers and then dash down the hallway. "Mom!" I screamed. If anyone could take care of skeleton monsters, it had to be my mother, right? She calmly escorted me to my room, checked under my bed for skeletal creatures, and tucked me in for a good night's sleep. This cycle repeated for almost two months.

My stress made me seek someone I trusted. At the core, stress is symptomatic of a lack of trust. Stress happens when you don't feel safe, you're uncertain about the future, untrusting of the people around you, or facing the unknown. Stress triggers a trust response. We attempt to cling to anything certain in an uncertain world. What do you cling to in times of stress? Is it your relationships, an addiction, the affection of someone, or your possessions? Whatever your reaction, there is a better response.

It's crucial that you trust something that's wholly trustworthy. God wired us to trust in something bigger than ourselves. That's why it's crucial that you let your stress lead you to trust God who is unshakable and unchangeable. Psalm 20 is a "prayer for the king" song that was recited in the royal courts. These sort of published prayers were common in the ancient world, especially when there was a big battle on the horizon.

In this passage, David prayed, "Some trust in chariots and horses, but I will trust in the name of the Lord" (20:7). Unlike possessions or people, God is unbreakable and unwavering. Stress makes you seek safety, right? There is safety in God's arms. It's just like a child running to their mother when he's scared. Trust in the true God. He can transform your stress into rest.

day 2 - seeking safety

READ: Psalm 23

Everyone was dressed in their Sunday best while silently sitting in the pews. Occasionally, someone would shift their weight, and it would make the long hardwood benches crack and creak. A pastor in a black suit cleared his throat and said, “The Lord is my shepherd, He makes me lie down in green pastures.” He recited Psalm 23 while standing behind a wobbly wooden podium. Eyes glued to the floor, I was seated in the first row with tears rolling down my cheeks. This excerpt of Scripture was read during my father’s funeral.

Psalm 23 is probably the most popular funeral passage in the whole Bible. Why? At first glance, it’s about a shepherd frolicking with some fuzzy sheep. That feels a little farfetched for a funeral, doesn’t it? However, as you dig deeper, you’ll see this chapter offers life-altering comfort during challenging times. This metaphorical language represents our relationship with God. We are the sheep, and He’s a protective caregiver. Shepherds lead their flock to the safest places for the night. Shepherds fight off predators with their staff. Shepherds go to great lengths to save their sheep in times of danger. This means that our shepherd does the same for us— He protects us and provides for us.

In the first verse, David discusses how our shepherd leads us to green pastures. What does that look like in your mind? When I imagine this illustration, I envision rolling green hills for as far as the eye can see. Think of the default Microsoft wallpaper. However, this is not what the author was referencing. He penned these words from ancient Palestine, where sprawling green pastures didn’t really exist. They lived in a land of sand— with only little pops of pasture. Shepherds would spend days hunting for petite patches of grass to provide their sheep a safe place to eat and rest.

God is doing the same with you. He will put in the work to help you find comfort. God will lead you through the desert to find an oasis. If you’re in a desert season of life, God will help you find what you need. Why? Because He’s a good shepherd. He will walk with you through the drought to facilitate you finding rest and rejuvenation.

Continue to walk with God. He’s taking you someplace safe.

day 3 - look for the light

READ: Pslam 27

New York City is known as “The City that Never Sleeps.” The backroads buzz in the middle of the night, the skyline sings in the wee-hours of the morning, and commuters move around the clock like little worker-bees in a massive hive. New York’s lights can be seen for miles, but all that changed on November 9, 1965. Just as the sun settled beneath the horizon, the whole city went black. The Great Blackout sent over 30 million people into complete darkness in half a dozen states in the North East.

It created an alarming situation, but the city prevailed. This blackout notoriously brought New Yorkers together in a time of literal darkness. Over 800,000 people were stranded underground in motionless subway cars during the complete blackout. Using pocket lighters, thousands of people helped disoriented commuters walk along pitch black subway tracks. It looked like a parade of fireflies flying through the underground tunnels. Millions of people were without electricity to make dinner, so creative cooks hosted village-wide cookouts by heating food over grills and flaming oil cans. From giving away food to checking on their neighbors, the citizens rallied together to survive the grueling 10-hour power failure.

Light shines brightest in the darkest surroundings.

In Psalm 27, David kicks off his song, “The Lord is my light and my salvation. I will fear no one” (27:1). Just like a child comforted by a nightlight, light frees David from fear. The message is clear that you do not have to fear. God is your light and your salvation. From the Israelites wandering through the wilderness to Jesus calling His followers the light of the world, the illustration of light is central to Scripture.

Light helps in three ways: 1) It helps you see things clearly, 2) It helps you feel safe, 3) It helps you know where to go.

Has your life ever went into a blackout? Has a sudden loss of light made you feel directionless and disoriented? We face different kinds of darkness, like stress, betrayal, and inadequacy. When you face darkness, look for the light. It will help you see things more clearly. It will help you feel safe. It will help you know where to go. Whenever you’re disoriented by darkness, look for the light.

READ: Psalm 28

Stress is like a snowball. If you were to roll a snowball down a snow-covered hill, the fluffy little ball would pick up layer-after-layer of snow, growing bigger and gaining momentum as it spirals downward. Stress often triggers a snowball effect. We get overwhelmed with one thing, and, next thing you know, every little inconvenience feels like a life-shattering situation. What started small is now spiraling out of control.

Stress breeds more stress. This is why seemingly minor stressors can become massive triggers when they're combined. This is how it looks in our lives. We get in a fight with our family which leads us to lash out at our friends which leads us to cry when we see a picture online which leads us to break down in sobs because we cannot find a matching sock. Usually a mismatched sock is no big deal, but it may break you during a stress-snowball. It has hundreds of different variations, but I'm sure you've seen this principle play out before.

Have you ever felt like God wasn't listening? David certainly did. He opens up this Psalm by saying, "Do not turn a deaf ear to me" (28:1). He's desperate for deliverance, which makes sense as Psalm 28 is classified as a lament for mercy. David's stress-snowball turned into an avalanche. Now he's spiraling out of control. The songwriter finds himself at rock bottom. Fortunately, he's laying on his back, looking up towards the heavens. His pleas transition into praise towards the end of this passage.

Breakdown can lead to breakthrough.

He praises God saying, "The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him. The Lord is the strength of his people, a fortress of salvation for his anointed one. Save your people and bless your inheritance; be their shepherd and carry them forever" (28:7-9). Here David offers us a three-part solution to stress. He praises God as his strength, shield, and shepherd.

God's strength will help you get through. Stress makes you feel unsafe, but God's strength gives you security. God's shield defends you. It will protect you from the attacks of the enemy. When the devil launches worry, panic, and fear your way, God's shield blocks the arrows. God shepherds you. This means that God will provide and guide, meeting your needs and guiding you to safety.

God stops the stress-snowballs in our lives by strengthening us, shielding us, and shepherding us.

day 5 - God is close

READ: Psalm 34:1-18 - Have you ever heard of stress fractures? They're tiny cracks in bones or buildings caused by repetitive force or friction. It's not like a major break where the moment of injury is obvious. Stress fractures take place over a long period of time.

Our hearts can experience stress fractures too. Sometimes our hearts break slowly. We didn't face a serious breakup, loss, or trauma. Rather, we are just feeling broken after a series of small setbacks or a season of stress. We've all faced these small fractures in some way. We've experienced shame, rejection, unmettable expectations, uncertain outcomes, or a vague sensation of restlessness. Eventually, it becomes too much to bear, and we break.

Psalm 34 was written when David was seeking refuge while on the run from Saul. He thought he had found a safe place with the Philistine kingdom. However, the king realized that David was a valuable hostage, so he captured him as a prisoner. David panicked, so he pretended to be a mad man. (Check out 1 Sam 22 for the whole story. It's fascinating.) At first glance, it seems like David just faked his breakdown, but Psalm 34 suggests some of his madness was authentic. David was fearful for his future, stressed over his current situation, and punishing himself for the mistakes of his past. All the stress made him break.

Chaos can make us extra creative. Whether it's imagining a far-fetched future or turning our agony into art, pain brings out the Psalm-writer in all of us. When writing this Psalm, David creates an alphabetic acrostic. This means that the lines and stanzas appear in alphabetical order without any repeated letters. Sometimes it feels like our troubles can be cataloged from A - Z. It seems as though we can put our pain into an alphabetized list. As David composes his list of frustrations, he gives us a solution for stress. We must understand that "the Lord is close to the brokenhearted" (Psalm 34:18).

God is closest to you in times of pain. David invites us to "taste and see that the Lord is good" (34:8). He is saying that it goes beyond intellect. It's an experience. Whenever your heart splinters with stress fractures or breaks into a million pieces, this passage promises that God is with you. He's actually extra close in times of chaos. There is comfort in closeness. It's the reason a hug feels so good after a hard day. It's the reason children feel safe in the arms of their parents and protectors.

God isn't just above you in heaven or looking at you on some cosmic television screen. God is *with* you. He is *where* you are right now. Whether you're alone in your room or surrounded by people at school, God is with you. God is closest when you feel the most broken. Let your anguish provoke awareness of God's presence.

day 6 - trust the timing

READ: Psalm 34:11-22

The thirty-fourth Psalm offers so much practical wisdom for stress that we broke it into two parts.

David was forced to flee from his home because he was being chased by a blood-thirsty executioner. King Saul, David's hunter, was upset that the people of Israel wanted David as king instead of him. This made him violently seek vengeance. Can you imagine being in poor David's situation? He was already anointed as King (1 Samuel 16). Furthermore, God assured him over and over that he would be the king. David knew all of this was true, but it didn't reflect reality. He was hiding in a cave, not sitting on the throne. While on the run, David prayed, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all" (Psalm 34:19).

David was not yet set free. He was writing these words while on the run, but he spoke to God as if freedom had already happened. This reflects a healthy perspective when facing stress. David saw God as the source of his pending salvation. Thus, he praised Him in advance. David knew what God was going to do. So do you.

God will deliver you.

We will all experience stress, sorrow, loss, heartbreak, and tragedy. When we face these, we want to be set free immediately. Our instinct is to desire instant deliverance. However, God does not always work according to our schedule. The Israelites waited 40 years before they came into the Promised Land. Abraham waited 100 years before the birth of his son. Jesus was dead for three days before the resurrection. Please understand that deliverance can take some time, but God will be with you every step of the way.

Stress makes us feel as though things must work out immediately. Whereas, faith assures us that everything will work out in God's timing. God will deliver you. It might not happen in an instant; however, it will be when you need it most. Trust God's timing.

day 7 - finding confidence for your future

READ: Psalm 42

“As a deer pants for water so my soul longs for you” (42:1-2) is a bumper-sticker verse. Companies print it on mugs, blankets, and home decor. I am sure this verse has even showed up on hunting gear at some point. This is not a cute verse, though. It is about an animal dying of dehydration. David seems as though he has moved from stressed to depressed in this passage. He’s not just distressed; he’s devastated. He leverages the imagery of a dehydrated deer longing for water. In the Palestinian desert, pools and streams were few and far between. Due to this, animal bones scattered the landscape. If a deer failed to navigate a stream, it would become another pile of bones in the sand.

This deer illustrates our lives when we’re going through severe stress. We find ourselves desperate for relief, desperate for our needs to be quenched. The absence of hope is like the absence of water. It is not just uncomfortable— it’s unbearable. The Psalmist is paralleling physical thirst with spiritual thirst. He is not thirsty for a water; he is thirsty for the presence of the living God. Just as our bodies depend on water, our hearts depend on God’s presence.

Look at what David says in verse 5: “Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him.” Even when it feels difficult, cling to hope. We have hope in His living presence. We have hope in the future of heaven. We have hope in every promise in Scripture. Store up this hope like you fill up a water bottle before a long hike. Let it nourish you when you feel empty.

When you feel like you can’t go on, hope in God.

When everything around you is unpredictable, hope in God.

When you experience fear for the future, hope in God.

We often say hope in the context of an expectation. “I hope I get off work early today.” “I hope the BBQ place isn’t sold out of brisket.” “I hope traffic isn’t too bad.” God doesn’t just offer hope for the future. He provides hope for the present. Our hope isn’t an aspiration— it’s an expectation. You can be confident in your future because you personally know the author of it.