



# Community Group Discussion Guide

The Psalms: Psalm 44 – November 28, 2021

**Happy Thanksgiving weekend.** This is a big travel weekend for many people and reminds me of the past times of travel in my life. Oklahoma, to many travelers, is considered a “fly over” state; one that is not stopped at but flown over to get somewhere else. To me, as I find myself reading through the Psalms, this chapter tends to be a “fly over” passage; one that I don’t stop at but tend to fly past and try to ignore. Today we are going to land at Psalm 44 and discover if it has some hidden treasures, just like Oklahoma.

**THEME:** Finding it unbelievable to suffer defeat when they have been faithful, the nation cries out in pain, but they affirm that God is the only one to turn to.

**TYPE:** Communal lament.

**AUTHOR:** A maskil of the Sons of Korah. For the director of music.

**BACKGROUND:** God’s people have suffered a major defeat in battle but believe that they have been faithful to God.

**STRUCTURE:** Stanza 1 (vv. 1-3) praises God for delivering the Promised Land to his people. In light of this, stanza 2 (vv. 4-8) professes confidence in God for victory. Stanzas 3 and 4 (vv. 9-12, 13-16) lament that God has not helped their armies and disgraced them. Stanzas 5 and 6 (vv. 17-19, 20-22) protest their innocence. Finally, stanzas 7 and 8 (vv. 23-24, 25-26) petition God to get involved and help.

## Starter Question:

- Have you experienced a time of deep pain or disappointment that caused you to question where God was?

## Discussion of Scripture:

This week we’re reading through Psalm 44. The title of the psalm indicates that this is a *maskil*, which means *song of instruction*. This psalm has two distinct sections (and each section is divided into two parts)—there’s a clear break between verses 8 and 9. And if the content of the psalm didn’t make it clear enough, the psalmist includes an explicit break by using the word *Selah* to cause us to pause and reflect.

In the first section, verses 1 through 8, we see that *God has been faithful*. Specifically, God has been faithful to establish the nation of Israel through our fathers (vv. 1-3). Additionally, God has given victory to the Israelite community as well (vv. 4-8). What’s more, all this blessing came by God’s hand, not by our ancestors’ hands, or our own.

## **Psalm 44 (NIV)**

**For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. A *maskil*.**

- <sup>1</sup> We have heard it with our ears, O God;  
our ancestors have told us  
what you did in their days,  
in days long ago.
- <sup>2</sup> With your hand you drove out the nations  
and planted our ancestors;  
you crushed the peoples  
and made our ancestors flourish.
- <sup>3</sup> It was not by their sword that they won the land,  
nor did their arm bring them victory;  
it was your right hand, your arm,  
and the light of your face, for you loved them.

In verses 1-3, the psalmist recounts God's deeds done in the days of their fathers.

- **What were some of those deeds?**
- **What are some ways God blessed the generations before you?**
- **Why is it important to remember these deeds to the next generation?**

## **Psalm 44:4-8 (NIV)**

- <sup>4</sup> You are my King and my God,  
who decrees victories for Jacob.
- <sup>5</sup> Through you we push back our enemies;  
through your name we trample our foes.
- <sup>6</sup> I put no trust in my bow,  
my sword does not bring me victory;
- <sup>7</sup> but you give us victory over our enemies,  
you put our adversaries to shame.
- <sup>8</sup> In God we make our boast all day long,  
and we will praise your name forever.

In verses 4-8, the psalmist remembers how God has given the current-day community victory.

- **Why is it important to remember how God has blessed you in your life?**
- **How has God shown His faithfulness to you?**
- **Why is it important to know that victory, success, and blessing are by God's grace alone, and not your own doing?**

In the next section, the mood flips considerably—we've just reflected on God's faithfulness, but now we feel the crushing defeat that has come to God's people. They wonder why such ruin has come on them when they have remained faithful to God. They cry out to God in this pain and disappointment.

**Psalm 44:9-22 (NIV)**

- <sup>9</sup> But now you have rejected and humbled us;  
you no longer go out with our armies.
- <sup>10</sup> You made us retreat before the enemy,  
and our adversaries have plundered us.
- <sup>11</sup> You gave us up to be devoured like sheep  
and have scattered us among the nations.
- <sup>12</sup> You sold your people for a pittance,  
gaining nothing from their sale.
- <sup>13</sup> You have made us a reproach to our neighbors,  
the scorn and derision of those around us.
- <sup>14</sup> You have made us a byword among the nations;  
the peoples shake their heads at us.
- <sup>15</sup> I live in disgrace all day long,  
and my face is covered with shame
- <sup>16</sup> at the taunts of those who reproach and revile me,  
because of the enemy, who is bent on revenge.
- <sup>17</sup> All this came upon us,  
though we had not forgotten you;  
we had not been false to your covenant.
- <sup>18</sup> Our hearts had not turned back;  
our feet had not strayed from your path.
- <sup>19</sup> But you crushed us and made us a haunt for jackals;  
you covered us over with deep darkness.
- <sup>20</sup> If we had forgotten the name of our God  
or spread out our hands to a foreign god,
- <sup>21</sup> would not God have discovered it,  
since he knows the secrets of the heart?
- <sup>22</sup> Yet for your sake we face death all day long;  
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.

**For Discussion:** To get a sense for the crushing defeat the psalmist is describing here, **highlight each main word or thought in verses 9 through 22 and describe each in depth.** For instance, what does it mean to be rejected? What does it mean to be disgraced? What does it feel like to have to turn back from your foes? What does it mean to be sold for a trifle? Meditating on each will help to understand the gravity of pain being described here.

In verses 17-22, the psalmist asks God why this defeat is being handed to them when they've been faithful. **Is the psalmist saying that they've been sinless?**

**Psalm 44:23-26 (NIV)**

- <sup>23</sup> Awake, Lord! Why do you sleep?  
Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever.
- <sup>24</sup> Why do you hide your face  
and forget our misery and oppression?
- <sup>25</sup> We are brought down to the dust;  
our bodies cling to the ground.
- <sup>26</sup> Rise up and help us;  
rescue us because of your unfailing love.

Verses 23-26 show a community who is desperate for the Lord to intervene on their behalf and to come to their rescue. **And, it ends there.**

- **Have you experienced a sense of desperation like this? How has God answered? Read Lamentations 3:21–32**

- <sup>21</sup> But this I call to mind,  
and therefore I have hope:
- <sup>22</sup> The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;  
his mercies never come to an end;
- <sup>23</sup> they are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.
- <sup>24</sup> “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,  
“therefore I will hope in him.”
- <sup>25</sup> The Lord is good to those who wait for him,  
to the soul who seeks him.
- <sup>26</sup> It is good that one should wait quietly  
for the salvation of the Lord.
- <sup>27</sup> It is good for a man that he bear  
the yoke in his youth.
- <sup>28</sup> Let him sit alone in silence  
when it is laid on him;
- <sup>29</sup> let him put his mouth in the dust—  
there may yet be hope;
- <sup>30</sup> let him give his cheek to the one who strikes,  
and let him be filled with insults.
- <sup>31</sup> For the Lord will not  
cast off forever,
- <sup>32</sup> but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion  
according to the abundance of his steadfast love;

- **How does this, in concert with Psalm 44, help illuminate how we are to view and respond to life’s pains and disappointments?**
- **How has Christ decisively rescued us?**

**Trying to put it all together and find those hidden treasures of Psalm 44:  
Here are some commentary quotations**

... in our moments of innocent suffering. We may be tempted to vent our rage, seek revenge, or play the victim — and this psalm certainly encourages us to speak our pain and confusion honestly and bluntly to God, holding nothing back. But verse 22 offers us the opportunity to transform our meaningless pain into an opportunity to glorify God. How we choose to respond to undeserved pain is a “kingdom moment,” a moment to reflect values that are not of this world but come only by the power and strength of God.

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This psalm reminds us that the people of God might suffer for following Him. Likewise, Jesus said that the world would hate His disciples (John 17:14). And yet He calls us to love people and share His grace (John 17:20–23). As you pray through this psalm, ask God to protect you from hardship as you seek to follow Him in a broken world. As the psalmist prayed, ask God to help you and redeem you in the midst of suffering (v. 26).

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Reflection: The psalm rings clearly with desperation, but it also contains the echoes of loyalty and confidence. Life doesn't make sense. But that is because we are convinced of God's character and work in the past. And indeed there is nowhere and no one else to turn to. In that disorientation God is both accused and pursued. Be honest with God; he can take it.

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Why do God's people often suffer even when they have done what is right? The answer lies behind the veil of divine mystery. But like Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, we drink the bitter cup when it is placed before us, joining the fellowship of his sufferings and becoming like him in his death (Lk 22:42; Ac 5:41; Php 3:10).

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Former experiences of God's power and goodness are strong supports to faith and powerful pleas in prayer under present calamities.

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God's ways are a mystery. The afflictions of life are often inexplicable to the human eye, and contrary to what God has already proved himself to be. The only recourse is to fly to God in prayer.

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Once we admit that the innocent can suffer and acknowledge that there are times when we do understand the pain in our life to be undeserved, we are ready to learn the central lesson of Psalm 44. The lamenting community does not merely acknowledge its innocent suffering and resign itself to it as the result of the mysterious purpose of God. Instead, they give meaning to their suffering by recognizing it is not simply unexplained injustice that must be borne and survived; rather, it is part of what it means to be like God, to “share in the sufferings of Christ,” so to speak; their suffering was “for [God's] sake.”

## **Responding in Prayer:**

Like me, are you experiencing deep pain or disappointment, or wondering where God is in a difficult situation? God has been faithful, and he hears our cries for help (Ps. 34:15).

Pray 1 Peter 5:6-11, acknowledging that the Lord cares for us during intense pain, and that He will rescue!

### **1 Peter 5:6-11**

*Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

Pray for our church, that we “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:1-3).