

# life groups

NorthStar Church

“Pour It Out”

Scott Cagle

April 22 and 23rd

Psalm 22

## Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What do you do when you feel overwhelmed or when your circumstances seem too difficult to bear?

Share a time when God felt distant. Why did you feel this way? Did you pray differently during this time? Why or why not?

In Psalm 22, David utters words that will later be uttered even more deeply by Jesus—“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” It is unclear what events in David’s life prompted this psalm, but it was likely David’s darkest hour. In this prayer, David expresses that he feels abandoned by God and humiliated before men. He feels that his present circumstances contradict the promises God has made to never leave or forsake him (see Deut. 31:8). This psalm has much to teach us about how we ought to pray to God when we are on the brink of losing hope.

## Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Have a volunteer read psalm 22:1-6.

To David, God felt far off while trouble was always near. And while God feels distant, men feel very close as they taunt, insult, and despise him. These men seem to know something about David’s relationship with the Lord and they mock him, they say, “He relies on the Lord ; let Him rescue him; let the Lord deliver him.” These are the circumstances that drove David to feel utterly “forsaken” by God.

Scott’s first point was that Jesus also felt abandoned by God. And if David and Jesus felt and expressed this same deep emotion, so can we. Sometimes the pressures of life can blur our self-image, but we can’t make decisions based on how we feel. What SHOULD we do and how SHOULD we react?

Have a volunteer read Psalm 22:7-21.

How does David describe his enemies (vv. 12-13,16-17)?

Scott’s second point was that Jesus felt abused by His enemies. True Christ followers will be hated and mocked by the world. Have you ever felt all alone in your struggles?

How does David feel physically (vv. 14-15)? Have you ever been so stressed that it made you sick? Why is our physical health so closely tied to our spiritual health?

Have you ever thought you weren't very good at praying? What might the vivid and dramatic language with which David prayed in this psalm teach us about how we should pray?

When David laid out his circumstances in verses 1-18, he wrote in the present tense—these are pressures, trials, and persecutions he is presently experiencing. David had not yet been physically delivered from his enemies or his ailments and yet he could confidently say, “You have rescued me!” David could say this because he had turned his attention away from his circumstances and to the presence of God. “You, O LORD, don't be far away” (v. 19).

In verses 20-21, David prayed that God would deliver him from the three creatures he previously feared. Why is it important to name and express our fears openly to the Lord? Why is it important to pray specifically for deliverance from them?

Have another volunteer read psalm 22:22-31.

Scott's third point was that Jesus feels the elation of the Father's deliverance. God never wastes hardship or tragedy in our lives.

David spent the remainder of the psalm worshiping God (vv. 22-31). How was David able to worship God in the midst of the incredibly trying circumstances he was in? How did David's perspective change?

David was able to praise God because he realized that the distance and humiliation he felt from God were true of him but they were never true of God. God was present in the midst of his afflictions. David was never despised or abandoned by God. David had turned his attention away from his circumstances and set his hope on the gracious (v. 24) and sovereign (v. 28) character of God. Doing so allowed him to freely praise the Lord and pray that everyone would acknowledge and turn to the Lord (vv. 26-27).

How might trusting that God is gracious (v. 24) and sovereign (v. 28) help you be able to worship God in the midst of deep affliction?

#### Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Have you ever felt abandoned by God? Ever felt abused by your enemies? Ever felt the elation of God's deliverance? Learn to acknowledge that these emotions are a gift from God!

What attributes of God should we focus on in order to find hope and strength in the midst of suffering?

How might the endurance with which Jesus faced the cross change the way we approach the afflictions and difficulties we face?

Who in your life is suffering? How might you come along side them and encourage them to look to Christ?

## Pray

Pray that your group would pray earnestly and passionately. Thank God for sending Jesus to suffer in our place so that we might be saved. Ask God to help us trust in His presence and character so that we will be prepared to face affliction. Pray that we would be able to point those who suffer to Christ.

## Commentary

### Psalm 22

22:1 This psalm opens with a question about God's rejection, similar to other lament psalms (10:1; 13:1-2). This rejection is represented by the term forsaken. The same idea appears elsewhere in the psalm with God being "far away" (v. 19) and "hiding His face" (v. 24). In his suffering, the psalmist foreshadowed the Messiah; in His suffering, Jesus identified with the psalmist (see Matt. 27:46). When Jesus quoted this first line, He was probably calling attention to the whole psalm, including the theme of victory at the end.

22:3-5 These verses identify the psalmist with the nation of Israel and more specifically with Yahweh's covenant faithfulness to His people as shown by His deliverance of them time and time again (78:53; 107:6). Enthroned on the praises is unusual, picturing Yahweh's dwelling above the cherubim on the ark of the covenant (80:1; 99:1). However, in this instance it is the praise of God's people that is the focus because Yahweh is the praise of Israel (see Deut. 10:21).

22:6-8 Worm expresses humiliation (see Job 25:6; Isa. 41:14), an idea that is further developed with the scorn of the enemies. Shaking their heads was a physical gesture often associated with sneering and mocking (see textual footnote on 44:14; cp. 64:8). This disgrace was in direct contrast to the fact that Yahweh had kept Israel from disgrace (22:5). The thought that Yahweh would not rescue one of His own was a common assumption by Israel's enemies (3:2; 71:11).

22:9-10 The phrase over to You is in the emphatic position in the Hebrew text, emphasizing that Yahweh is the One in whom the psalmist has trusted since birth.

22:12-13 The connection between one's enemies and wild animals, especially lions, is found in other psalms. With bulls the point seems to be strength rather than fierceness.

22:14-15 The terminology in these verses conveys the notion of being drained of strength. A heart like melting wax is similar to the image of "melting hearts" in other contexts where the emotion of fear is so intense that all courage disappears (see Deut. 20:8; Jos. 2:11; 7:5). Dust of death implies the nearness and inevitability of death (see Job 7:21; 10:9) and is sometimes linked with Sheol (see Job 17:16).

22:16 The Hebrew text is difficult, reading literally "like a lion my hands and my feet" for pierced my hands and my feet. Other manuscript traditions read the Hebrew ka'ari ("like the lion") as a verb from the Hebrew root krh, meaning either "to bind" or "to dig." Digging could be synonymous with piercing. Christians have often adopted this reading and seen it as a prophetic allusion to Christ's crucifixion since NT authors quote so much of this psalm in relation to that event (e.g., Matt. 27:46).

22:17-18 Counting bones seems to be related to imagery where a person was so emaciated from suffering or brutality that his bones were visible (see 102:5; Job 19:20; 33:21). Dividing garments is an attested practice in Middle Assyrian laws where a criminal's clothes could be given to the prosecutor or to those carrying out the sentence. It was apparently practiced in other cultures, including Rome in the first century, as evident in the death of Jesus (Matt. 27:35; John 19:23).

22:20-21 The psalmist uses imagery from animals to represent enemies. All are repeated with the exception of the wild oxen instead of bulls. Their horns that gored in an attack are the main focus in that image. Dogs might not seem like a negative image because of their role as pets in modern Western society, but in much of the ancient Near East they were never domesticated and were always wild and ravenous animals.

22:22-24 Verse 22 begins a new major section in this psalm, shifting the focus from petition to thanksgiving. The shift might indicate that the prayer of verses 1-21 had been answered or that such an answer was anticipated. Thanksgiving was to be offered in the congregation to evoke praise from the people of God. This was the responsibility of anyone whom Yahweh rescued, so that the entire community could rejoice in God's acts of deliverance (66:16). Whereas the psalmist praised God for being delivered from death, Jesus the Messiah brought glory to God through His death and resurrection.

22:25-26 The vows were those made during the time of prayer (50:14; 61:8; 66:13). Their fulfillment also took place in the great congregation as a further testimony of God's goodness to the psalmist. Any ceremonially clean person witnessing someone's praise offering was permitted to eat from it (see Lev. 7:11-21).

22:27-31 The psalm ends by broadening to the most universal purpose of God's kingdom over the earth. Israel's purpose was to be a testimony to other nations so they would bow down before Yahweh and serve Him (67:2; 72:11,17; 86:9). The growth of the kingdom throughout time is demonstrated in the phrase a people yet to be born (future generations). The inclusion of those who go down to the dust who would pay homage to Yahweh (v. 29) is unusual, since in other psalms it is clear that the dead cannot praise Him (6:5; 88:10-12). This is more likely a reference to the final stage of God's kingdom where even the dead are brought back to life to recognize Yahweh's authority over all things (see Dan. 12:2).