SESSION 7

A PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

The Point

Express gratitude and trust in the One who hears our prayers.

The Passage

Psalm 138:1-8

The Bible Meets Life

My greatest emotional pain comes when I know one of my children is suffering. One of our daughters was diagnosed with an incurable disease when she was a child. My wife and I were devastated as we made plans for her immediate treatment.

On the morning we were to take her to the hospital, I was up early, praying. In my pain, my words seemed almost meaningless. Then, while struggling to pray, for some reason I simply said, "Thank You." Those words were an extreme contrast to the circumstances we faced. For thirty minutes I knelt in the dark and whispered, "Thank You." In light of our daughter's diagnosis, it seemed strange to pray a prayer of thanksgiving, but I kept praying. Later that morning at the hospital, after a series of tests, the doctor informed us they had found no sign of the disease—and he had no explanation why. Had the original diagnosis been incorrect? Had our daughter been healed? We don't know, but thirty years have now passed with no sign of the disease.

The Setting

Psalm 138 reflects King David's grateful heart. He thanked God for hearing his prayers. Also, he affirmed his confidence that God would care for him. With the psalm, David offered a message of praise to God that encouraged others to trust God too. It's placed next to Psalm 137, a psalm of lament. The psalmist wrote about the deep sorrow of God's people as they witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and their grim future in Babylonian captivity.

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What does the Bible say?

Psalm 138:1-8

The gods (v. 1)—A Hebrew word that in this case described idols in David's day that pagan people considered divine and worthy of their worship.

1 I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise;

2 I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word.

3 On the day I called, you answered me; my strength of soul you increased.

4 All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O Lord, for they have heard the words of your mouth,

5 and they shall sing of the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord.

6 For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar.

7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me.

8 The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

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THE POINT *Express gratitude and trust in the One who hears our prayers.*

GET INTO THE STUDY

5 minutes

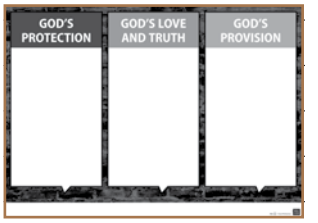
Notes

DISCUSS: **Question #1** on page 117 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): **"When have you been overwhelmed by gratitude?"** Allow time for each person to respond.

GUIDE: Direct group members to **"The Bible Meets Life"** on page 118 of the PSG. Emphasize the importance of thanksgiving by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to **"The Point"** on page 118 of the PSG: **"Express gratitude and trust in the One who hears our prayers."**

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 11,** "A Prayer of Thanksgiving" poster, to offer group members the opportunity to express thanksgiving. Distribute sticky notes and pens to your group. Introduce the pack item, but don't use it yet. As each section of Scripture is completed, draw the group back to the poster to add sticky notes to the particular section they just studied. Invite group members to consider what specifically they are thankful for when it comes to God's love and truth, God's provision, and God's protection. Then ask them to place their responses on the poster. Using this list, lead your group in a prayer of thanks for what God has done and what He will do!



ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): **In advance,** enlist a few group members to bring food to share at the beginning of the session. Ask other members to bring canned goods to provide food for a needy family (to be delivered later in the day). As members prepare to eat, offer a prayer of thanksgiving. Invite the group to share gratitude to the Lord for His provision and for enabling them to be part of His provision for other people.

PRAY: Transition into the study by thanking God for the way He has blessed us. Ask for His wisdom and insight to share those blessings with others.

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10 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Psalm 138:1-2

1 I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; 2 I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Psalm 138:1-2 on page 119 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand the possible context for this psalm being written.

RECAP: Offering a word of thanks to God is a fairly universal reaction to good news. Even non-believers sometimes will do that. Most people have expressed prayers of gratitude at some point. In one survey, eighty-eight percent of those interviewed said they often offer prayers of thanks.[10] When good things happen, we're drawn to thank God because we know He's responsible for our blessings.

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from pages 119-120 of the PSG. We have so much to thank God for, but David focused on two attributes of God for which he was especially thankful.

- **God's constant love.** The Hebrew word for love, *hesed*, refers to more than emotion or sentiment. God's love toward His people has revealed itself in acts of loving kindness and gestures of mercy.

- **God's truth.** God has not left us in the dark. He has revealed Himself to us. God has taught us the truth of who He is, who we are (sinners), and who we can be in Christ.

DISCUSS: **Question #2** on page 119 of the PSG: **"How has God displayed love and truth in your life recently?"**

TRANSITION: In the next verses, we see not only how we should thank God for His love and truth, but for how He provides all we need.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
Why do we often fail to give God thanks for what He has done?

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THE POINT *Express gratitude and trust in the One who hears our prayers.*

Psalm 138:1-2 Commentary

[Verse 1] Matthew 6:9-13 assures us our Father listens when we pray. When we grasp the reality that God hears our prayers, our hearts fill with gratitude. If we follow the path carved into the first two verses of Psalm 138, we thank God for His love and truth. Some Bible scholars have suggested David wrote the psalm after he reflected on God's promise to him about his future. (See 2 Sam. 7.) However, the psalm could have been the product of David's review over his long life and God's goodness in every part of it. Either way, he obviously wrote it to express sincere gratitude to God. David could have written about his troubles or chronicled his royal successes and boasted about his military victories. He could have written about his achievements and the trophies he had collected. But he didn't. Instead, David gave himself to praising God alone, allowing the light of glory to shine only on God. By singing, David channeled the thankfulness that overflowed in his heart through his voice. With his song, David bore witness to the truth that only the living God of Israel deserved his praise. His testimony of praise sent an important affirmation about God's presence. In surrounding kingdoms, people worshiped idols they considered to be divine beings. They bowed before lifeless deities in futile devotion while David worshiped the living God with a thankful heart.

[Verse 2] For David, bowing accompanied singing. A gesture of humility, bowing before the Lord expressed David's response to being in His presence. Singing praise to God ushered David into worship. As he continued to worship, however, David became more aware of the precious holiness of the moment. His awareness that he had come into the presence of God brought him to his knees in humility. Worshiping God has the same effect on growing believers. In personal or corporate worship, we do well to begin with praising the Lord for who He is and thanking Him for what He has done. Our praises beckon us into His presence. There we find ourselves humbled by the reality that God has given us the honor of being His children through Christ. In response, we humble ourselves before Him in sincere submission and grateful devotion.

As David continued to worship with a thankful heart, he turned his thoughts to God's great name. A person's name said something about his or her character. When David wrote about God's name, two traits of His character came into view. David had seen for himself that God loved him. He also knew from his personal walk with the Lord that God always told the truth. The Lord had shown David that He could be trusted to be faithful in His love and true to His word. The reliability of God's great name had a powerful effect on David's life. Because God took His name very seriously, His people could count on Him to keep His promise. David didn't live with doubt casting a shadow over his relationship with God. He knew that if God made a promise, He would honor it without fail. Therefore, David learned how to abide in the assurance of God's promise to him.

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10 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Psalm 138:3-6

3 On the day I called, you answered me; my strength of soul you increased. 4 All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O Lord, for they have heard the words of your mouth, 5 and they shall sing of the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord. 6 For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Psalm 138:3-6 on page 120 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand how David thanked God for His faithfulness.

RECAP: David experienced a season of life when his strength was gone. It appears to have been more than just a physical fatigue; his complaint seems to have stemmed from a spiritual or emotional weariness. It happened to David, and it can happen to us. Regardless of the cause, spiritual and emotional discouragements can leave even the strongest believers drained of strength.

DISCUSS: **Question #3** on page 120 of the PSG: **"How does physical or emotional fatigue affect us spiritually?"**

ALTERNATE QUESTION: ***When have you seen God's faithfulness and provision give opportunities to reach others for Christ?***

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity, "Giving Thanks," on page 121 of the PSG to help them focus on offering prayers of thanksgiving.

Use the space below to describe one of the images and how you might be thankful in that situation. [PSG has four pictures from which to choose.]

RECAP: God is great and far beyond His creation, yet "he regards the lowly." He responds to us out of His great love and compassion. God will not forget our needs. As we seek Him in prayer, God renews our strength and passion—and we can trust Him with every need in our lives.

TRANSITION: The next verses show us that we should thank God because He protects us and will fulfill His purpose in us.

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THE POINT *Express gratitude and trust in the One who hears our prayers.*

Psalm 138:3-6 Commentary

[Verse 3] Along with God's love and truth, we thank Him for providing what we need. David celebrated the faithfulness of the Lord to him when he asked for help. With his recollection of God's answering his prayer, David reminded God's people about the value of a long memory. Remembering how God provided made a huge difference to David. Not only did God meet his need, something else happened to him. By answering his prayer, God strengthened David spiritually to the point he could become extremely bold. His fierce courage came from his unbending assurance of the Lord's provision. He knew he would have what he needed so he could carry on with God's work each day.

[Verse 4] Such a deep and abiding sense of assurance enabled David to serve the Lord in a day when the kings of surrounding nations worshiped idols. As David thought about them, he wrote about the anticipated day to come when the Lord would be the center of their worship and service too. He went on to be specific about what would make them turn to the Lord in complete devotion. They would be prompted to give themselves to the Lord once they encountered His promise for themselves. Instead of cold and empty silence from lifeless deities, they would experience profound hope in a relationship with the living God.

[Verse 5] Just like David broke out in song over the Lord's care for him, the kings in the surrounding nations would also sing about Him. Their song would center on God's involvement in their lives and kingdoms. The Lord would work with them in ways that would result in their adoration of Him. God alone would be worthy of their praise. They would be captured by His intimacy as well as His majesty. As the kings of the earth came to the Lord and bowed in grateful worship before Him, they would affirm His greatness. They would exalt Him as the Lord. No other ruler would receive greater acclaim. They would refuse to cast the light on themselves or their kingdoms or their accomplishments. The light of glory would shine only on God, and He alone would be exalted.

[Verse 6] The kings who sang about the Lord would agree on one aspect of His reign. He exerted sovereign rule over them and their kingdoms and looked with favor on people who walked in humility before Him. The lifeless deities they worshiped before they came to the Lord didn't have hearts of compassion for humble people. But the Lord's compassion prompted Him to reach down to help the humble. For God's people, humility came to be an important feature of acceptable worship because they recognized His ultimate authority. But the Lord would not allow a person consumed by selfish pride to come into His presence. Kings expected everyone to bow before them in humility. The notion of being humble themselves would have been repugnant to them. A king who humbled himself before the Lord and sang praises to Him for His greatness would be difficult to find. Yet, David knew that any king who knew the Lord intimately would bow before Him in grateful humility.

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15 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Psalm 138:7-8

7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me. 8 The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Psalm 138:7-8 on page 122 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: **Question #4** on page 123 of the PSG: **"How does a thankful spirit give you courage as you face challenges in life?"**

RECAP: King David understood political and personal insecurity. He was a warrior king who had enemies both inside and outside the borders of Israel. David walked "in the midst of trouble." We might even say constant danger was his normal experience. The danger he faced was intense and unpredictable, yet David trusted God. For David, God's protection was a matter of life or death.

Trust in God is the basis of all prayer. When we pray with thankfulness, it is an expression of faith that God will fulfill His purposes for us.

ALTERNATE QUESTION: ***What's happened recently in the life of our group to cause us to say, "God is faithful"?***

DISCUSS: **Question #5** on page 123 of the PSG: **"What steps can our group take to further develop a pattern of praising and thanking God?"**

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): **In advance,** prepare to play the clip for Shane Barnard's song "The Lord's Prayer" to help the group conclude this unit. Then invite group members to recite the Lord's Prayer together, concluding with a prayer asking Him to help us to pray as He has taught us.

Note: A link to the clip may be found at BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra.

GUIDE: Refer back to **"The Point"** for this session: **"Express gratitude and trust in the One who hears our prayers."**

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THE POINT *Express gratitude and trust in the One who hears our prayers.*

Psalm 138:7-8 Commentary

[Verse 7] Our God provides for us, and He also keeps us and protects us. David drew us to that affirmation as He directed attention to God's ways and our future. Fear did not factor into his life because he had learned to trust the Lord completely. Because he had been protected through some terribly dangerous events, David refused to live in fear so long as the Lord guarded his path. But notice that David brought up the anger of his enemies. Anger moved David's enemies to take extreme measures. However, such measures did not succeed because God protected David. At times in David's reign, he probably observed anger swelling in the hearts of his adversaries that could have provoked them to kill him. Of course, any attempt failed, and David made sure he expressed his gratitude to God for protecting him. When David incorporated the image of God's **hand,** he had God's awesome power in mind. Throughout the Old Testament, writers used the idea of God's hand to describe His limitless strength and His ultimate authority. Writing about God's **right hand** in this verse gave David the picture he needed to describe His tremendous strength. God's peerless power insured victory for His people when He used it in their favor.

[Verse 8] David's statement about God's purpose gives us confidence about what He's doing in us. It brings to mind the instruction Jesus gave us in the Model Prayer. Jesus instructed us to pray with a heart of submission to the Father. (See Matt. 6:10.) Surrendering to God when we pray means we give up on building our own kingdoms. Instead, we devote ourselves to His kingdom and His will. When we take our devotion to Him seriously, we tap into an encouraging assurance. We rest assured that God has given us a purpose in keeping with His kingdom. When we live it out, we abide in His joy and contentment. Growing believers want to fulfill God's purpose. Just as important, we trust God to work within us so His purpose for us can be fulfilled for His glory.

Suddenly, David stopped writing about God and started talking directly to Him. Specifically, he focused his attention on God's loyal love or mercy to His people. David lived with the abiding certainty that God's unending love would be demonstrated in His faithfulness. God's people could depend on Him to be at work in their lives, enabling them to fulfill His purpose for them. His unique love had a persevering quality that would make it extremely durable. Accordingly, His steadfast love for them would last longer than a lifetime.

Once more, David brought up God's hands. Earlier, he used the picture to describe God's power to protect His people. Here, he incorporated the image to convey the truth about God's initiative. Because the Lord loved His people faithfully, He would enable them to carry out His purpose. He would take the lead in their lives so they would not falter in carrying out His purpose. Thus, David asked the Lord to never allow them to leave His work unfinished. David didn't want anything to stand in the way of God's people fulfilling His purpose for them.

Read the article "David's Enemies" in the Fall 2018 issue of *Biblical Illustrator.* Previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles relate to this lesson and can be purchased at *lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator.* Look for Bundles: Bible Studies for Life.

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5 minutes

Notes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 124 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications:

- **Be thankful.** Every day this week tell God something you are thankful for.
- **Write out your thanks.** Make a list—a long list!—of all the reasons you have to be thankful. Pray through the entire list and thank God for the different ways He has blessed and touched your life.
- **Thank someone.** Write a handwritten note to someone for whom you're thankful and tell that person why you thank God for him or her. Include a prayer of thanksgiving.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 124 of the PSG:

> If we want to have a fully developed prayer life, we have to learn to regularly offer thanks to God in prayer. And as we've been reminded, God is worthy of our gratitude even before we know His plans.

PRAY: Conclude by thanking God for having taught us to pray. Thank Him for the Lord's Prayer and the blessing it has been to so many for so long in so many different languages and cultures. Ask Him to help us share its truths with others this week.

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WHEN WE SAY FATHER

BY STEVE ROGERS

There are many different ideas about what God is like. The ancient Greeks' version of God—Zeus—was often petulant and moody and known to zap those who were his objects of wrath or frustration with a well-aimed lightning bolt. Buddhists don't believe that there is such a thing as a personal god. Hinduism's god, Brahma— whom they worship, as creator of everything—has no form and is, essentially, "the universe and everything in it." To Muslims, Allah is omniscient and all-powerful. He is also inscrutable and inaccessible; it is not possible to know him personally.

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Contrast all of that with Jehovah, the God of the Bible. On one hand, He is a God to be reverenced and feared: "The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him" (Hab. 2:20).

Yet, to a believer, God is not only the Almighty God-of-the-angel-armies, He is our Father. In contrast to other world religions, our God is Someone with whom we can have an intimate, personal relationship.

The Model Prayer Jesus gave His disciples contains incredible insights into that relationship God wants us to have with Him. The key that unlocks all of these insights is found in the first two words: "Our Father." God not only wants us to *think* of Him as Father, He wants us to *address* Him as Father.

Although God sees each sparrow that falls, our relationship with Him is on a much more intimate basis because since God is our Father, that makes us His children. As such, we are objects of His sustaining love and tender mercies.

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Even though God's children number in the billions, He knows and calls each of us by name. Stop and think how incredible that is: The Lord and Creator of the universe knows whom we are—what makes us tick, what we like to eat, and what our struggles are.

An eight-year-old girl, attempting to quote the Lord's Prayer, said it like this: "Our Father, who art in heaven, how does He know my name?" As God's children, we have the privilege to address Him as Father. And when we do, some wonderful things happen:

When we say, "Father," we express God's nature. A father is not someone God is like. Father is who God is. Human fatherhood is patterned after divine Fatherhood, and our earthly fathers give us insight into God's nature. However, unlike earthly fathers who come with frailties and shortcomings, our heavenly Father is all wise, all loving, and all caring. Aren't you glad your Father in heaven will never be considered an "absentee father"—that He will always be there whenever you need Him?

And since God is our Father, the converse is also true: We are His children, adopted into His family. This passage from Galatians beautifully explains our new relationship with Him: "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, … so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God" (Gal. 4:4-7).

When we say, "Father," we experience God's nurture. At dinnertime, the children of a loving father don't worry about whether there will be food on the table. They know their father works hard every day to be able to buy enough groceries to feed the family. In the same way, we don't have to worry about whether God will take care of our basic needs; He has promised to do so. In Matthew 6, the same chapter where Jesus gave us the Model Prayer that begins "Our Father," He shares this admonition: "Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on" (v. 25). Jesus gives the assurance that "your heavenly Father knows that you need them all" (v. 32).

Take comfort in the fact that God calls Himself *Jehovah-Jireh*, the Lord our Provider. He's your Father; He *will* take care of you.

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When we say, "Father," we exalt God's name. In the Lord's Prayer, immediately after we are invited to address God as Father, we are exhorted to pray, "Hallowed be thy name" (Matt. 6:9, KJV). Even though we enjoy an intimate relationship that can only occur between a child and a father, we should never use God's name lightly or in a trite or flippant manner. Instead, the Scriptures encourage us to honor and reverence it, placing it high above all other names: "Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name" (Ps. 29:2).

Each of the names God uses to describe Himself reveals something about His character. In the Old Testament, God is referred to as *El Shaddai*, the Mighty God, and *El Elyon*, the Most High God. However, in the New Testament, we find a new name for God: *Abba*. This is the word Jesus used on the cross when He cried out in agony and pain to His Father: "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will" (Mark 14:36). *Abba*—a word that expresses the intimate relationship between a father and a child—is the same word we can use to address our heavenly Father: "You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" (Rom. 8:15).

As children of the King, we not only exalt His name with our lips, we exalt His name with the very lives we live. As members of God's family, His name now becomes part of our own: "child of God." I love how my earthly father, Adrian Rogers, expressed this wonderful relationship: "We have the family likeness to wear, the family loyalty to share, and the family name to bear."

So take your concerns and your needs to God in prayer. There is no request too big or too small for Him. *El Shaddai*—the Mighty God—is "able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). But don't forget to call Him Father. When we say, "Father," we express His nature, we experience His nurture, and we exalt His name.

Your Father is waiting (and wanting) to hear from you. He's just a prayer away. You know what to say.

STEVE ROGERS is the president and co-founder of the Adrian Rogers Pastor Training Institute, headquartered in North Palm Beach, Florida. Steve is a well-known author, songwriter, and speaker. Steve and Cindi have one daughter, Adrienne Renae, who is married to Brian, and a grandson, Townes.

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ENDNOTES

Footnotes:
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COMING NEXT QUARTER

The Full Picture of Christmas

SUGGESTED FOR THE WEEK OF			
December 2	Session 1	***Isaiah's Prophecy***	*Isaiah 7:10-14; 9:6-7; 11:1-5*
December 9	Session 2	***Joseph's Obedience***	*Matthew 1:18-25*
December 16	Session 3	***Mary's Trust***	*Luke 1:26-38*
December 23	Session 4	***The Angels' Announcement***	*Luke 2:1-14*
December 30	Session 5	***Simeon's Proclamation***	*Luke 2:25-35*
January 6	Session 6	***The Wise Men's Worship***	*Matthew 2:1-11*

Engaging Culture in an Ever-Changing World

January 13	Session 1	***When Races Collide***	*Ephesians 2:11-22*
January 20	Session 2	***When Life Is Expendable***	*Exodus 1:16-17,22–2:9*
January 27	Session 3	***When Circumstances Overwhelm***	*Psalm 42:1-3,6-8; 43:3-5*
February 3	Session 4	***When Substances Take Over***	*Ephesians 5:15-21*
February 10	Session 5	***When Marriage Is Questioned***	*Genesis 2:18-25*
February 17	Session 6	***When Materialism Consumes***	*1 John 2:12-17; 3:16-18*
February 24	Session 7	***When False Religions Deceive***	*1 John 2:18-29*

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