

**Group discussion** *Each number below includes questions that relate to the scripture. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better. Save time for “the big question.”*

**Read Psalm 85** *Spend time in quiet reflection on this passage. This text breaks down into three sections – 1-2, 3-7, and 8-13, so select three readers to read the text out loud slowly. Spend 2-3 minutes in quiet reflection, then read it again. This follows a Christian tradition called “lectio divina,” or divine reading.*

### **Break it down**

1. What is the topic of verses 1-3?  
*Reminding God of his past blessings.*

Why would God need to be reminded? Why would the people praying this prayer need reminding?

What actions of God are mentioned in 1-3?  
*Pointing to a time when Israel had sinned & suffered for it, but God forgave their sin and helped them heal from the punishment.*

2. What is the request made of God in verses 4-7?  
*Turn aside your wrath once again.*

What does this say about the spiritual condition of Israel at this time?  
*Once again, they were being punished for sin.*

We don't know the date of this Psalm. It could apply any time after Joshua, though, because there was a constant cycle of Israel turning away from God & suffering, followed by Israel repenting & being restored. Why do you think they kept turning to sin?

What does the Israelites' attraction to sin say about human nature?

How is our situation similar? How does sin lead to pain?

3. If sin caused Israel's trouble, why did they cry to God for help?  
*Where else could they go?*

4. What is happening in verses 8-9?

How does this resemble repentance?

5. What is the conclusion of the Psalm (10-13)? What has happened to this person who has repented?  
*He or she sees a vision of restoration. The physical blessings have not yet come (verse 12 is future tense), but the healing has begun.*

### **Put it together**

This psalm is a single prayer, even though we've chopped it up into sections with the questions above.

Ask your three readers to read Psalm 85 aloud one more time. Spend 2-3 minutes in silent reflection.

6. This Psalm tells a story. What happened in this Psalm? How would you re-tell this story in your own words?

How does this vision of restoration relate to the rest of the Psalm, especially the repentance in 8-9?

7. What does it mean to “listen to God” (8)? How did this writer listen to God?

When have been some times you have listened to God?

What are you doing to increase your attention to God?

† **The big question** *If you ask only one question, let this be it. Allow at least 20 minutes. Go around the circle and give each person an opportunity to answer. It's okay if they pass, but at least they get a chance to respond.*

How does this Psalm connect with your life? How is God speaking to you through this Psalm? How is God speaking to you through other channels?

## Resources

### **Bible notes**

3 “Selah” is possibly a musical notation, but scholars are unsure of its meaning.

The Hebrew word “turn” (shubh) shows up in 1, 3, 4, 6, and 8. In a language with no italics or bold, repetition was a tool to give emphasis. You can get a sense of this dynamic by highlighting words that begin with “re-“ or include the word “turn.” Meaning: we find the place of peace and love by turning to God, who revives and restores our rejoicing.

### **Prayer ideas**

Pray for revival – in our group, our church, and around the world!  
Ask God to open our ears to his message.

Thank God for blessings above & below (Psalm 85:11) – list blessings that fall on us and blessings that rise from within.

Tonight in Albuquerque, the Montgomery Church is offering a special prayer of blessing over Kevin, Chase, Reid & Trey Owen, and Jana Graves. Ask your group to join that prayer, and include a prayer for Montgomery.

**Kid-friendly activity.** *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

Give each person a piece of paper and crayons. Or pair us each kid with an adult, and give each pair one sheet.

Fold the paper in half. On half of the page draw a picture of a way God has blessed you. On the other half, draw a picture of how you would like for God to bless you in the future.

Read Psalm 85 aloud. You might use three readers, as described on the inside of this guide.

What had God done for this person in the past (1-2)?

What was this person asking God to do in the present (3-7)?

What action did he decide would help God answer this prayer?  
*Verse 8 – listening to God.*

What does it mean to listen to God? How would kids do that? How would listening to God affect future blessings?



March 9, 2008

## **LIFE Group Guide**

### **Psalm 85 – Listening to God**

By John Grant (jgrant@colleghills.org)

The theme: **Listening to God leads us to peace and love.**

Psalm 85 is the prayer of a person who was blessed to serve God in the past but has turned away. The writer contrasts earlier blessings to current distress, and then there is an "aha!" moment in verse 8: "I will listen to what God will say." It is amazing to read the blessing that follows.

Thanks to your great response to the LG lunches in the last month. Jeff, Charles, Darrell & I soaked up helpful feedback and new ideas. If you missed the lunch, please let me know how you and your group are doing. We want your group to thrive, so tell us what support you need. You'll see one idea on the back page – Bible notes for the text. Also, check our website for some great training events in the region.

Another idea was a Friend night or service project on 5<sup>th</sup> Sundays (March has one). Consider these opportunities to serve:

- **Habitat house** construction begins March 22.
- The **VIP** group is looking for hosts on 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays. Host in your home (if wheelchair accessible) or at the church building. Lots of fun with a sweet group. Call Peggy Bell at 453-1604.
- **Tornado clean-up.** Info at [www.lafayettechurchofchrist.org](http://www.lafayettechurchofchrist.org).

Leadership tip: Build bridges to unbelievers and newcomers. Look for opportunities to share the blessing of your group by inviting guests.

**Relate** *Use a few to introduce the theme, check everyone's spiritual pulse, and "break the ice." No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage through these questions.*

- ❖ What is your favorite Psalm?
- ❖ When was the last time you returned something to a store?
- ❖ The best thing about spring is...
- ❖ Notice the prayer suggestions. Could be ice-breakers.