- I cannot think of a better introduction to our study tonight than to be standing together, singing praise to the Lord.
- God gave us an intense capacity for deep emotions
    - And to express that emotion, He gave us song, and music, and poetry, and art.
    - Across all of human history and every different culture, songs, poetry and music have communicated the deepest and most raw emotions of the artist to those who hear.
        - This ability for us to connect with the emotion of a song is so palpable that even with just one line of a song or poem we remember we can bring to mind the whole experience.
            - When this nation's anthem is sung and we hear "the bombs bursting in air gave proof through the night that our flag was still there,"
                - We can immediately understand the emotion of the song, we're drawn in to the moment when the song's author, Francis Scott Key, sees the country's flag flying over Fort McHenry in defiance of the enemy's bombardment.
                - The emotion of resilience in the face of adversity doesn't need to be described because it can be felt.
            - You can accomplish the same thing with just the words
                - "But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?" brings to mind the emotion of a young man, smitten with a woman's beauty
            - Even just music without words can have the same effect.
                - ~~Hearing the Star Wars films' iconic Imperial March brings to mind fear and impending conflict with a confident, in-control villain.~~

- My personal favorite is the building suspense and dread inspired by just two bass notes in the Jaws theme.
- Song conveys emotions

- We're studying in the Bible's book of songs and poetry today, Psalm 31, and if we approach this text forgetting that this is a song then we will miss the point entirely.
  - A good song does have words with strong meaning, and a great song, like Psalm 31, is worth studying and analyzing those words for their meanings, but if we approach this study tonight focusing only on the words and the meanings without recognizing the emotion behind the song, then we have missed its purpose.
  - If you hear the Star-Spangled Banner and your primary thought is about the durability of the flag, then you have missed the point. You understood the words but not the emotion.
  - Understanding the emotion will be our focus tonight.
- This Psalm has more to teach us than it first appears, there are actually three different stories this Psalm is telling.

Psalm 31:title (ESV)

TO THE CHOIRMASTER. A PSALM OF DAVID.

  - The superscription, the text at the beginning, tells us this Psalm was written by King David to be sung, and the first story we have to understand the story of the Psalm as it was written by David,
    - and to understand the emotions he poured out in the Psalm.
- The Psalm starts with **David *pleading* for refuge (v1-8)**

Psalm 31:1–4 (ESV)

[1] In you, O LORD, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me! [2] Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily! Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me! [3] For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name's sake you lead me and guide me; [4] you take me out of the net they have hidden for me, for you are my refuge.

- The opening line of verse 1 sets the tone for the rest of the song. David is simultaneously declaring that he takes refuge in the Lord for safety, present tense, while also pleading with the Lord for future deliverance, for rescue, for refuge and for salvation.
- Then he declares to God the reason God should heed his pleas. God is his rock and fortress. It is for the glory of God's own name that God should lead and guide David.
    - Even as he pleads for future deliverance David reminds God of His status as David's redeemer, rescuer and refuge.[1]
    - Like Moses interceding for the people of Israel when he stood before God in Exodus 32 and asked God to remember His covenant with His people.
- What emotions do we see in David's opening verses?
    - There's this dependence on God's redemption, this pleading and reminding in order to receive the redemption that David knows he needs and that God alone can provide.
        - I have it but I also need it.
    - David doesn't wait for a response, but his confidence in the Lord is so great that he already begins responding as if God's going to answer his pleas.

[1] Why is David reminding God of these things? Did God forget? No, this reminder serves a dual purpose. First, it is consistent throughout scripture that songs and prayers to God call to mind promises and attributes of God, not as a literal reminder but as a point of praise of God's attributes and as a reminder of them to the one hearing the message. Secondly, the emotional turn in the Psalm into despair at verse 9 would indicate that David himself may feel like God has abandoned him and may need (in a poetic sense) reminding of His role as redeemer.

Psalm 31:5–8 (ESV)

5 Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God. 6 I hate those who pay regard to worthless idols, but I trust in the LORD. 7 I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love, because you have seen my affliction; you have known the distress of my soul, 8 and you have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy; you have set my feet in a broad place.

- The emotion of the song moves from a place of pleading and reminding, a place where the singer wants redemption but it's not sure, it's not guaranteed, into a place, instead, where David has now fully committed to his faithful God.
    - David's redemption is in the past tense
    - David has already started to change his life and his thoughts to match the God who he is confident has redeemed him.
        - His priorities are in line with God, he hates what God hates, he rejoices in what God loves
        - The reason he conforms his own desires to God's desires is "<u>because</u>" God knew him intimately in all of his afflictions and distress and still delivered him to safety.
- We have this beautiful opening the song that expresses such deep <u>helplessness</u> and <u>pleading</u> for God's redemption paired with <u>trust</u> and <u>confidence</u> in God's power and willingness to save.
- In our first story of Psalm 31, the story of King David, what can we see in David's life that could lead him to write such things with such emotion?
    - The story of David in the Bible through both 1st and 2nd Samuel is long and detailed but it is full of moments testifying to God's deliverance of His servant David.
        - As a young shepherd boy in 1st Samuel 17, David testifies to the times he encountered lions and bears harrowing his flock and God strengthened him to overcome the beasts.

- In the same chapter, he stood before the legendary giant warrior, Goliath, whose fearsome presence and armor and weaponry terrified an entire army of soldiers, but David's trust in God to rescue, redeem and save him carried him to victory against Goliath.
    - Probably the world's most famous underdog victory, all because David decided to trust in the Lord, just like he does in Psalm 31.

- David's need for rescue didn't end with Goliath but continued for most of his life
    - He was pursued relentlessly by the mad king Saul, chased away from his home and family while the king tried to hunt him and kill him.
        - Yet even then, David knew very well what it means to trust the "rock of refuge" and the "stronghold" of God because he was delivered from Saul by hiding in the rocky strongholds of the mountains in 1 Samuel 23.
        - If you're hearing these examples and picturing David as a movie character then I need you to scrub that out of your mind.
            - Anyone can write a song about a pretend hero and a pretend God, but the emotion of Psalm 31 should go past our imaginations and strike us in our emotional centers, right in our hearts.
                - King David is a real man, who really faced these terrifying, life-threatening circumstances and who was really delivered by God who knows him and loves him.
    - Even through his later years as king, later dangers and battles and plots, David consistently found salvation from the Lord.

- There are too many examples to go over here, so wouldn't you think that if David is the number one expert on trusting in the Lord's deliverance from anything and everything that he would be able to face any moment with complete joy?
- But never-ending joy is not the emotion David puts into Psalm 31, but instead the next section of the song deals with **David's overwhelming *despair*. (v.9-13)**

Psalm 31:9–10 (ESV)

[9] Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also. [10] For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away.

- Sit with that emotion for a moment, church.
  - This same man that was delivered and rescued was also <u>sad</u>. Sad a lot.
    - Not just sad for an evening, or grieving for a time when someone he knew died, but this man was <u>wasting away in grief</u>.
    - This man describes his life as full of sorrow and his years with sighing.
      - This isn't feeling bummed out, this isn't seasonal depression, this is chronic, debilitating depression.
        - And it's in the Bible.
- In church, listening to a sermon, we want to analyze it, and we want to understand it, and we want to hurry along to see where Jesus is the solution.
  - Now listen, Jesus certainly is the solution, He has promised to wipe away every tear and to conquer death for eternity, but you and I and King David aren't there yet,
    - and in the meantime, this world can make us waste away. David knows that.
- David had a family, one that looked down on him, but then he was taken from them to serve the king.

- It was supposed to be exciting, only that king quickly became his enemy and his hunter.

- David had a best friend, closer than a brother, only this evil king was the friend's dad and David had to flee for his life never to see his friend again.
- David had a wife, one who saved his life, only this wife was the evil king's daughter and David lost her and saw her given to another man.
- David was a soldier who led men into war and saw them die, many of them in his name.
- Again, we <u>have</u> to remember that we're not talking about a character in a novel, we're talking about a real man pouring his heart out into this Psalm for us to feel what he feels.
- But in verse 10 here, what David actually attributes his pain to is not the loss of all of these loved ones, but instead his years of grief and distress and depression are because of his <u>own iniquity</u>.
    - David has guilt for the things he's done.
    - We know David from an early, early age was devoted to the scriptures and God's law and knew of God's standards for righteousness and knew all the many ways he failed to meet them daily.
    - But much more than common daily struggles with sin, David knew he had done some of the worst things a man can do.
    - One of the most famous points of David's life in scripture is when the king, anointed by God, who should be leading his people to the highest standard instead chooses to take for himself and destroy.
        - He takes the wife of one his soldiers in an adulterous affair, he then plots the man's murder and steals his wife to cover up a surprise pregnancy.
            - What blood on his hands does he feel daily, "For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away."

- Some years later, David finds the earthly consequence for his sin when God allows his son, born from the sinful union, to die from sickness.
    - So far in my life, God has protected me from having to feel the pain of losing a child you've known and loved in your life, but those who've experienced it often say it's the most powerful grief you can encounter.
        - I can only imagine it's that much worse when you know it's your fault.
        - "I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also."

- Where has this Psalm brought us emotionally?
    - What was <u>pleading</u> and <u>reminding</u> and <u>trust</u> before, is now <u>grief</u> and <u>sorrow</u> and <u>depression</u>.
        - If you had to draw a curve of the emotion, it would have just plummeted off a cliff.
        - And we're not out of the trench yet

Psalm 31:11–13 (ESV)

[11] Because of all my adversaries I have become a reproach, especially to my neighbors, and an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me. [12] I have been forgotten like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel. [13] For I hear the whispering of many— terror on every side!— as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.

- The previous two verses were sad, yes, but they were about David only,
    - and now we see in his times of greatest, deepest sadness when he needs comfort and companionship that he gets the opposite.
- David's acquaintances and friends that should be supporting him are now disgusted and dreadful of him.
    - Rather than being greeted with a hug, the mere sight of him causes people to run.
    - David's treated like he's not even there, like's he died.

- This breaks him the same way you'd shatter a clay pot.
    - He's broken to pieces, never the same again.

- Why would David's mere presence cause this type of abandonment?
    - Because it's really dangerous to be around David, he has some extremely powerful enemies.
- These same words coming from the mouth of a mellow dramatic teenager would be exaggeration and funny, but from David they're dead serious.
    - Like we mentioned before in his younger years, David spent years of his life hiding in caves away from civilization as the most powerful man in the land relentlessly hunted him trying to kill him!
    - Once Saul was gone and David finally ascended to the throne it wasn't like this problem stopped.
        - Twice, David had to deal with civil war and coups against his power, and one of those came from his own son.
        - 2 Samuel 16 gives us a moment where the anointed and reigning king David is fleeing from his own capital city into the wilderness while a random commoner is following him along the rode and hurling rocks and insults at him.
- The emotional curve of Psalm 31 continues to nosedive. We're now passed <u>depression</u> and <u>grief</u> and have sunken to complete <u>abandonment</u> into <u>paranoia</u>.
- How does a person in the midst of oppressive, crushing depression, grief, abandonment and paranoia react to the God who has allowed them to be there.
    - How would you react?
    - Maybe what you've gone through is pretty similar to David, or maybe like me even your worst days are, like, less than 10% or even 5% of how bad all this is, but they're still the worst things you've ever gone through.

        - I've said goodbye to closest friends, I've felt abandoned or betrayed by other friends, I've lost loved ones, I've battled periods of extended depression in my life.
    - You know that on a good day, in this moments, it's easy to forget God, or to numb yourself with distractions or to just stop caring.
    - On a bad day, how quickly do we start demanding answers from God, or turn to anger or blame or rebel against God.
    - What does David do?
- Earlier we were surprised how a man so confident in his deliverance could shift to depression, but here David surprises us yet again.
- David **chooses trust** (v14-18)

Psalm 31:14–18 (ESV)

[14] But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." [15] My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors! [16] Make your face shine on your servant; save me in your steadfast love! [17] O LORD, let me not be put to shame, for I call upon you; let the wicked be put to shame; let them go silently to Sheol. [18] Let the lying lips be mute, which speak insolently against the righteous in pride and contempt.

- David, despite everything he's been through, chooses trust in the Lord first. "I trust in you." "You are my God."
- David doesn't doubt that God is capable or powerful or in control, in fact he states quite plainly "my times are in your hand."
    - David doesn't resort to anger or question the Lord's goodness or the Lord's right to bring hardship on him.
- Also, importantly, David doesn't wait for his circumstances to change before choosing to trust the Lord.
    - The trust is the first thing.

- Because David knows the Lord is in control and because David chooses to trust Him, then David goes back to pleading
    - He asks God to make right these things that are wrong.
    - He asks God to be his rescuer.
        - Rescued from the guilt and sin that crush David's bones.
    - He asks God to bring justice and fairness to an unfair world
        - David trusts the Lord to protect him from all these evil and violent people that threaten him and ultimately to be the one delivering true justice.
- The emotion of the Psalm has picked right back up to where it started.
    - At the same time, a past-tense <u>assurance</u> and <u>trust</u> in the Lord for salvation and also a <u>pleading</u> request for continued rescue.
- The biggest question on everyone's mind should be: "How?"
    - How can David have gone through what he's gone through, feel the things he said he feels, and yet still simply choose to trust the Lord.
    - How does David maintain this rock-solid faith and hope in God despite everything?
- The Psalm's next section answers: **David remembers God's *words* and *deeds*** (v19-22).

Psalm 31:19–22 (ESV)

[19] Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of the children of mankind! [20] In the cover of your presence you hide them from the plots of men; you store them in your shelter from the strife of tongues. [21] Blessed be the LORD, for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was in a besieged city. [22] I had said in my alarm, "I am cut off from your sight." But you heard the voice of my pleas for mercy when I cried to you for help.

- The first source of David's hope, despite all the tragedy and grief and terror, is that David knows the promises of God. David knows the Word of God that contains those promises.
    - David is not looking for relief or justice or comfort anywhere on this earth but he has eyes looking towards eternity that say "How abundant is the goodness which you have stored up for those who fear you."
        - Not goodness that has been poured out, but goodness awaiting the future.
- The second source of David's hope is that David knows the history of God, both in his own life and in the Word of God in scripture!
    - David also mentions the goodness that God has "worked for those who take refuge in you."
    - Scripture is nothing if not full of people who desperately needed God and who received exactly the rescue they needed.
        - Whether it is food in a famine, a boat during the flood or a sacrifice to pay for a sinner's debt, David knows that anyone who takes refuge in God are covered by His presence and taken care of.
    - David doesn't limit the past to scripture either, he brings in his personal testimony.
        - He can specifically remember the deepest and darkest moments of his life when he felt hemmed in by his enemies, trapped with no escape, forgotten by God
            - And he also remembers how God rescued him out of those circumstances.
- I want you to go back to imagining that emotional curve of Psalm 31,
    - the faith and confidence up high, the deep bit of depression, then this future hope back up high.
    - If David is currently sitting stuck in the middle of that trench, what he's doing is he's throwing up two ropes.

- David's got one rope firmly latched on the future, onto the promises of God for heavenly glory and sin conquered and tears wiped away and he's got that firm in his hand
- Then he's got the other rope tossed out behind him into the past, where he's latched it onto story after story of God's faithfulness to rescue and protect His beloved children. (and on his own stories to match!)
- What David is doing is pulling tightly on these ropes to lift himself out of the pit.
    - His circumstances haven't changed, but this future hope and past testimony have combined in such a way, David remembers God's words and deeds and this is what allows him to choose trust. (Even in the same bad circumstances)

- With his choice firmly made, what does David do last?
    - David has spent this entire Psalm talking back and forth in the second person to God.
    - Now with his choice to trust having been made, he turns out to face you who would listen to this song and he has a message for you. **David *commands others* to faith** (v23-24)

Psalm 31:23–24 (ESV)

[23] Love the LORD, all you his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts in pride. [24] Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the LORD!

- After all this don't you just want to sing this out with David?
- There are two things we need to learn from David's final statement.
- First, these two verses really plainly speak for themselves.
    - Hear the command, church, Love the Lord!
    - Anyone faithful to the Lord can be preserved. Preserved from their own guilt and sin, and also preserved from the attacks and plots of others.

- But anyone tries to proudly handle the problem of sin themselves without the merciful and gracious sacrifice offered by Jesus Christ is going to receive the repayment they're owed by God for their sin.
- Be strong and take courage and wait on the Lord for He is coming to rescue us.

- Now this is all true, but in addition we have to recognize that just like David, we don't keep these truths to ourselves, but if we are choosing to trust the Lord like David did,
  - then we should also be out commanding others to faith like David did.
- Songs are not for communicating emotion in private, they're sung out and performed for all to hear so that the messages and emotions inside can be communicated.
- With that, we now have the full picture of the emotion of Psalm 31, and we've finished the Psalm's first story of a man named David.
  - By writing this Psalm, David was communicating those emotions
    - His pleading for refuge
    - His overwhelming despair
    - His choosing trust
    - His remembering God's words and deeds
    - And his commanding others to faith
- But this Psalm isn't quite done with us. There's a second story here.
  - Once we know the emotion wrapped up in Psalm 31, we don't need someone to sing the whole song to remind us of it anymore, simply to quote one line.
    - Remember what we said at first about how even a small part of a song can deliver the entire emotional payload of the song?
      - "Our flag was still there" is all I need to say to remind you of all those emotions.

- Well you may already know, or you may not, but one line in particular from Psalm 31 might have been a little familiar to you, because it was quoted at a very, VERY important moment.

Luke 23:44–46 (ESV)

44 It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, 45 while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46 Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.

- At the darkest moment of grief and love in all of history as the divine creator died on a cross to save His creation, He used His last breath to sing verse 5 of Psalm 31.
    - This is no storybook and no movie; there was no string orchestra accompanying him with a swelling note and there was no speaker amplifying his voice.
    - If you're unaware, in the process of crucifixion, the dying person's lungs are unable to breathe unless they force their bodies up by their piercings.[2]
        - The moment of death often comes from suffocation when that person no longer has the strength to lift themselves up.
    - It's no accident that Luke describes Jesus calling out this piece of Psalm 31 in a "loud voice" and then he's said to "breathe his last".
        - In his dying moments, Jesus gathered his strength for one last message to those who were listening.
        - He used the very last of his breath, not only to commit his Spirit to His Father,
            - but to remind everyone listening of something. What was it he was saying?
    - You know what Jesus was saying.

[2] (Grudem 1999, 251-252)

- Jesus was saying He had pleaded with His Father for rescue as He prayed fervently to "Lord if it be your will, take this cup from me, but not my will but Yours be done."
- Jesus was saying He was in the midst of overwhelming despair
    - His bones wasted away under the guilt and sin of the world that He took on that cross
    - His closest companions had fled from him and his enemies surrounded him with terror on every side seeking to kill him.
    - Yet in this moment of darkness unrivaled in all of history, Jesus was telling us that He chooses to trust His Father.
    - He chooses to trust His Father because He knows His Father into eternity future and He knows His Father's Word and promises of future glory and resurrection for His son.
        - He chooses to trust His Father because He has known His Father for eternity past and experienced His love and faithfulness.
    - And lastly, the reason he spoke those words so loudly, is because He was giving a command to those who heard.
        - Imagine yourself in that crowd, weeping as your savior and only hope is dying in front of you, and then He looks right at you, he heaves himself up for breath and he sings to you to remind you of this command:
        - "Love the Lord, all you, His saints! The Lord preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts in pride. Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord."

- Jesus meant what he said literally, He gave up His soul in death to His Father, trusting for rescue.
    - Not rescue <u>from</u> death, but rescue <u>after</u> death, rescue <u>through</u> death.

    - But Jesus wanted His disciples, including those standing there and you and I today, to know that even when your body is beaten and destroyed and your life is ripped from you, and you have nothing left, the Lord still preserves the faithful, He still store up abundant good for those who fear Him and He still abundantly repays the one who acts in pride.
- Jesus died that day so that an adulterous, murdering, sinful king named David could say confidently, "The Lord is my refuge," and he could be rescued from his sin.
- Jesus died that day so that Psalm 31 could have one more story to tell. The story about you and I.
    - We can plead for rescue to a God who redeems and saves sinners because of His great love.
    - We can cry out to Him in our despair because our sin still weighs us down and the world and Satan in the world still terrorize us.
    - But we can also choose to trust in Him because we can look ahead to His good promises and we can look behind to His everlasting love and faithfulness and the sacrifice of His own son for our sins.
        - The Lord rescues His children. Sometimes He rescues from death and sometimes He rescues after death.
    - Lastly, we must not forget to proclaim this to others.
        - Proclaim to the world outside these walls that the Lord preserves the faithful and repays the one who acts in pride and that we wait for the Lord who will return for us in rescue and glory.
- Church, let's pray, let's sing praise to our king.

Sample prayer

God, Your word is alive and active and speaks to our hearts tonight. You know the richest, deepest emotions of our hearts. Our grief and struggles are not far from You, but You've instead chosen to love us and take our struggles on Yourself. Use these words and this lesson tonight to comfort, to show your deep love and to inspire your church so that we go out and proclaim your goodness to a world that is desperately in need. Thank you for being a God that saves sinners like David and like this church of brothers and sisters around us that plead for your salvation. We are those who fear the Lord, we are those take courage, we are those who wait you, Lord. Send your son quickly to our rescue.