



Leader's Guide

An Adult Education Course
From Wesley Ministry Network

JOURNEY THROUGH THE PSALMS

LEADER'S GUIDE

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n Christine Suerdieck

Purpose of Course Leader's Guide

This guide is designed to help you prepare and deliver the *Journey Through the Psalms* course.

The Leader's Guide has three sections:

- **Course overview**, which describes the overall purpose and delivery of the course.
- **Course management**, which offers guidance for setting up and delivering the course.
- **Facilitator Session Guides**: This section will provide you with notes and recommendations on how to facilitate each course session. The text of the Participant's Guide is included together with leader's notes, printed in **red**.

How to Use the Leader's Guide

- Read through the course Leader's Guide to get an overview of what the course entails.
- Use the checklists as guides to help you prepare and deliver the course.
- The Leader's Guide provides suggestions for facilitating the course. Read through the notes before you conduct the class and feel free to make notes in the margins, as necessary.

Objectives of the Course

- ✓ Recognize the range of prayer in the Book of Psalms.
- ✓ Describe how the psalms have been used in the history of the church.
- ✓ Recognize the figurative nature of psalm language and how it articulates the spectrum of our emotions in our diverse experiences of God.
- ✓ Identify ways in which the psalms help us speak about God (theology) and about ourselves before God (anthropology).
- ✓ Pray the psalms as prayer and pray our own words in the spirit of the psalmists.
- ✓ Suggest ways in which the psalms may be used in our worship together and in our informal pastoral care of one another.

Course Description

The course is designed to be delivered in eight (8) one-hour sessions, following the order of the chapters in *Journey Through the Psalms* by Denise Dombkowski Hopkins.

In the Participant's Guide, the **Preparation for Session** indicates what students are to learn during a given session and provides instruction on how to prepare for that class.

Before participants read the assigned text, they are encouraged to complete the **Connecting with Scripture** exercise. This exercise provides a biblical framework for the week's reading from *Journey Through the Psalms*.

Upon completing the reading, participants are encouraged to answer the questions in the **Personal Reflection** section. The purpose of these questions is to help students interpret and use what they have studied within the framework of their beliefs and experiences as a Christian.

The table on the following page summarizes the sequence of general topics and recommended readings. Refer to the Participant's Guide for specific weekly assignments and study.

If you wish, you may copy the table and distribute it to participants. If you decide to do this, make sure you complete the **Dates** column with the dates appropriate for your course.

Note: Although it would be beneficial for participants to have read the first chapter of Journey Through the Psalms as preparation for the first class, it is not required that they do so.

Study for Each Class Session of Journey Through the Psalms

Session	Topic	Study to be Completed for the Session	Dates
1	Praying the Psalms, Praying into Wholeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Chapter 1 of <i>Journey Through the Psalms</i> ❑ Psalm 1; 150 	
2	The Synagogue, the Church and the Psalms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Chapter 2 of <i>Journey Through the Psalms</i> ❑ Psalm 72; 51 	
3	Your Hallelujahs Don't Have to Be Hollow Anymore <i>Praise Psalms</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Chapter 3 of <i>Journey Through the Psalms</i> ❑ Psalm 33; 46; 48; 146; 150 	
4	You Get What You Deserve, Don't You? <i>The Torah and Wisdom Psalms</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Chapter 4 of <i>Journey Through the Psalms</i> ❑ Psalm 1; 37; 73 	
5	Complaining in Faith to God <i>Psalm Laments</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Chapter 5 of <i>Journey Through the Psalms</i> ❑ Psalm 17; 22; 44; 64; 73; 88 	
6	Life in the Meanwhile <i>The Process of Lament</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Chapter 6 of <i>Journey Through the Psalms</i> ❑ Psalm 13; 41; 44; 88 	
7	The Lord Reigns <i>Enthronement Psalms</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Pages 133-34 and 140-153 of <i>Journey Through the Psalms</i> ❑ Psalm 47; 93; 96-99 	
8	I'll Never Be the Same Again <i>Thanksgiving Psalms</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Pages 135-140 of <i>Journey Through the Psalms</i> ❑ Psalm 8; 30; 107; 113 	

Facilitator and Participant Course Evaluations

As part of ensuring that this and other Wesley Ministry Network (WMN) courses address the needs of our participants and facilitators, we invite you and your class provide us with feedback on what you liked as well as on what you think we could do to improve this course.

In the Appendix, there are two forms that you can copy: Participant Course Evaluation and Facilitator Course Evaluation.

During the last class session, please allow approximately ten (10) minutes for participants to complete the **Participant Course Evaluation** form. Make sure you have enough copies for each participant to complete and turn in.

We ask that your students complete the forms by interviewing each other in pairs, with each interviewer writing the responses of the person interviewed. We believe that the information you collect by doing the evaluations in this way will enhance the learning experience for all.

After the class is concluded, we ask that you also complete the **Facilitator Course Evaluation** and provide us with your thoughts and suggestions.

Please return the completed evaluation forms to WMN by either of the following:

Fax: 202 318-0883

Mail: Wesley Ministry Network
Wesley Theological Seminary
4500 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20016-5690

Class Preparation Checklist

✓	Task
	Notify participants of course session date and time.
	Reserve and set up the room to facilitate the course.
	Copy and assemble/obtain course materials, as necessary, including participant copies of the book <i>Journey Through the Psalms</i> by Denise Dombkowski Hopkins and, if desired, the weekly letters found at the course website (see above “Supplemental Materials”).
	Anticipate participants’ questions and prepare answers. Identify any additional resources you need to provide the answers.
	Prepare any notes, materials, and information you need to facilitate the session.
	Arrange tables and chairs so that the layout is conducive to learning.
	<p>Set up materials for each participant.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Participant Materials <input type="checkbox"/> Paper, pencils, pens, highlighter <input type="checkbox"/> Materials for nametags or name tents

Checklist of Journey Through the Psalms Course Materials

✓	Material	Quantity
	<p><i>Journey Through the Psalms</i> text</p> <p>Note: It is recommended that students read <i>Journey Through the Psalms</i>, but it is not absolutely necessary that they do so. The video contains enough information for those who do not read the book to participate in the class discussions.</p>	One per participant plus facilitator
	<i>Journey Through the Psalms</i> Participant's Guide	One per participant
	<i>Journey Through the Psalms</i> Leader's Guide	One per facilitator
	Old magazines, glue sticks, scissors, butcher block paper	Enough for each participant to share
	Hymnals	One per participant
	26 sheets of construction paper	
	Extra Bibles for participants	As needed
	Course session supplies (pen, pencils, highlighters, paper, etc.)	One set per participant
	Flipchart pad	One per classroom
	Flipchart markers, in assorted colors	One set
	Masking tape for posting flipcharts	One roll
	TV and VCR or DVD player	One set
	Other props, game materials, prizes, awards, or equipment	As needed

Weekly Class Session: Order of Activities

Each class session will include the following segments, usually in the same order each time.

Opening Prayer

A prayer has been provided to open each class session. You may choose to read the prayers together as a class or ask participants to volunteer to lead the prayer.

Focusing

After the prayer, students will participate in a brief activity that is designed to focus their thoughts and attention on an issue that is central to what they are learning in that class session. The activities vary and may involve individual work, small group discussion or class participation.

Video Segment

A video segment, usually from 10 to 15 minutes in length, provides participants with a summary of the class session's concepts and topics.

At this time, you may want to provide a brief overview of what participants will address during the session. One way to do this is to review the learning objectives for that session.

Participants are to jot answers to questions in their Participant's Guides as they view the video. Allow a brief discussion after the video to review answers, clarify concepts, and address participants' questions.

Activity

Each class session offers an activity related to the study topic. These activities vary and may involve individual work, small group discussion or entire class participation.

When participants break into small groups to complete the activity, they will be asked to report back to the class at the end of the activity.

Feel free to adapt any of the activities to specific needs of your class.

Group Discussion

Each session will include discussion questions that go beyond the readings in the text to ask, in effect, “So what?” These questions are intended to help participants delve deeper into their own beliefs by considering the difference some idea or issue might make in their lives.

Conclusion and Closing Prayer

During this time, briefly discuss the assignment for the following week. You may also need to distribute materials or make announcements.

To close the class, we suggest that you ask participants to share their “joys and concerns.” Encourage participants to write what has been shared in their Participant’s Guides so that they may remember them as they pray during the week.

For the first class, you may decide to lead the closing prayer. For subsequent classes, ask participants to volunteer to close with the prayer in the study guide or to lead the class in praying the prayer in unison.

How to Facilitate the Course

The Facilitator's Role

- **Be relaxed.** The facilitator sets the tone for the class.
- **Ask questions.** If a participant provides an answer you were not expecting, look for the logical thought process that led to that answer. Stress that there are no invalid questions.
- **Give everyone time to think.** After asking a question, wait six to ten seconds for an answer. The silence allows everyone to think through a response.
- **Allow discussion to evolve among participants** without controlling the flow. As facilitator, you will *start* the discussion. If the group begins talking among themselves, it is a sign they are taking responsibility for their own learning. Step in only if the discussion goes off topic or runs out of time.
- **Keep track of time.** Move discussion along according to the suggested guidelines.
- **Ask for other points of view.** Your role is that of *facilitator*, not *lecturer*. When opinions or concepts are expressed in a safe environment, participants have the opportunity to consider additional information.
- **Add appropriate humor.** Even heavy topics can benefit from a light touch.
- **Have fun.** It encourages learning and confidence.

Encourage Sharing of Opinions

Some students will have strong opinions, while others will not. It is important for students to bring their own ideas to the table for discussion.

If one or two students appear to dominate, some helpful questions can open up the learning space, such as:

- “Are there other ways to look at this issue?”
- “Has anyone thought about this from a different angle?”
- “I’d like to hear from someone who has not commented on this yet.”

Create a Safe Learning Environment

For many students, religious study has meant having the right answers or feeling judged. Help create a safe learning environment by affirming the ways God is at work in all we say and do.

Everyone is valued, as is every contribution received in the learning environment. This does not mean that we should agree with everything said, but that we recognize all the voices around the table.

One helpful image comes from Paul: we are the body of Christ. Some of us are hands, some of us are ears, and some are feet. Feet “see” the world differently than ears do, and hands see things differently, too. Yet all the parts of the body make up the whole. So it is with your class. You can encourage broad participation by affirming the contributions of everyone.

Share the Floor

Most adult learners have a good sense of sharing discussion time. Occasionally, a troubling dynamic develops if one or two students appear more knowledgeable or opinionated, causing other students to stop participating. Try to anticipate this development, because once the dynamic is established, it is very hard to change.

Strategies for intervention can include using only small groups for a session or two so that dominant individuals are isolated and others can speak in the small groups to develop confidence and trust in sharing.

Transition from One Activity to Another

It is important to pace the class in a way that is natural. Do not feel you need to rush through. Instead, think about which activities would work best for your particular group of learners. Give participants time to focus on each class segment or activity in order to facilitate deep learning, not surface treatment.

If an activity or segment seems to be particularly engaging and productive, feel free to spend a few more minutes on it than may be allotted. Conversely, if an activity does not seem to engage students, feel free to move on.

Transitioning from one segment to another requires giving students some verbal cues about what is happening. As one activity comes to a close, it can be helpful to say, “We’re going to take two more comments on this topic, and then move on to the next activity.”

When transitioning from small groups back to the plenary, again, give the groups a one or two minute warning to wrap up their work and return to the class as a whole.

Facilitate Class and Small Group Work

During class and small group activities, be attentive to how participants are responding. Make notes, if necessary, so that you can raise questions and concerns during a follow-up discussion.

During individual and small group activities, circulate among participants while they are working to see if they have any questions. Also, be sure to note the common difficulties participants may be experiencing and address those problems during the session.

Make sure there are no obstacles to learning, such as noise, inadequate supplies, etc.

Be sure to follow-up with participants who have questions or experience difficulty during the session.

After each session, take a few minutes to record what worked, what did not work, and your thoughts on what transpired.

JOURNEY THROUGH THE PSALMS

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

WITH INSTRUCTIONS TO LEADERS IN RED

AND EQUIVALENT PAGE NUMBERS IN BLUE

Page 3 of Participant's Guide**Preparation for Session 1: Praying the Psalms, Praying into Wholeness****Learning Objectives:**

At the end of this session, students should be able to:

- Clarify course objectives and expectations.
- Begin to recognize the range of prayers found in the psalms.
- Investigate the use of psalms in one's own church, especially in hymnals.

Connecting with Scripture:

Skim the Book of Psalms rapidly. Then read the first and last psalms (1 and 150). Jot down brief answers to the following questions. List responses below.

1. To what kind of God do the psalmists pray? (Use adjectives, such as "powerful," and nouns, such as "Creator.")

2. What pictures of themselves do the psalmists draw? (Use adjectives, such as "joyous" and nouns, such as "creature.")

3. How have you already used the Psalms as a resource for your faith? What might it mean "to pray the psalms"?

Page 4 of Participant's Guide**Study for this Session:**

- Read Chapter 1 of *Journey Through the Psalms*.

Study Overview:

As a “school of prayer,” the psalms teach us that there are many different kinds of prayer and many different ways of praying to God. The Psalms express the entire range of human emotion - fear, praise, anger, joy, thanksgiving, and despair – experienced in the context of our relationship to God. Living with the psalms enables us to be honest as we faithfully bring our whole life before God.

The psalms remind us that faith includes struggle and doubt as well as gratitude and celebration. Doubt is not the opposite of faith, but rather part of the faith experience. A healthy faith embraces all the seasons of life and the entirety of our emotional lives.

The psalms begin with a call to obedience (Psalm 1) and conclude with joyful praise (Psalm 150). The psalms also express the very real experience of “living in the meantime,” a time when we wait to hear from God again in our lives. Praying the psalms connects us with our Hebraic and Christian roots and awakens us to an experience of God that embraces the totality of life.

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Personal Reflection – Session 1: Praying the Psalms

As you reflect on prayer and the psalms, please consider the following questions:

1. How do you define “prayer”?

2. Does your definition of prayer embrace all of your emotional life? Is it possible to have both feelings of gratitude and anger in relationship to God? Are there any parts of your life that you are choosing to hide from God?

3. Does your experience of faith include doubt and struggle as well as trust and certainty? Do you find it possible to share your uncertainties with God?

4. What emotions characterize your relationship with God at this time?

Class Session 1: Praying the Psalms

Participant's Guide:

Opening Prayer

Read the prayer together as a class.

O Lord, you have searched us and known us; You know when we sit down and when we rise up. Be with us as we journey through the Psalms so that we may come to know you more fully and love you more deeply. Amen.

From Psalm 139

Leader's Notes:

Welcoming the Class

Introduce yourself and welcome participants as they arrive.

Give each student a Participant's Guide, if they do not already have one.

Ask participants to make name tents upon arrival and to place the name tent in front of them at their table or desk. Name tents can be made with single sheets of letter-size paper, folded into thirds to make a table tent.

Understandably, the length of class sessions varies from church to church. **Note that the times allotted for each class segment listed in this and subsequent lessons might need to be modified so that the entire session fits within the available class time.**

Opening Prayer (2 Minutes)

When everyone has assembled, start the class with the Opening Prayer.

Focusing

In small groups, introduce yourself with the following statement:

“My name is _____ and my favorite Psalm is Psalm _____ because ...”

Video

As you watch the video, take notes to answer the following questions:

1. In what ways do the Psalms give us back our dignity?

2. What is metaphor?

3. What are the two most common or central metaphors of the Psalter? Give examples.

4. Think about images that convey God as refuge for you. Then think about what our culture defines as refuge. How is God’s refuge different?

Focusing (10 minutes)

During this first session, participants will have the opportunity to introduce themselves and share their expectations about this course.

A good introductory icebreaker for Session 1 is to have each participant introduce him or herself with the statement in the “Focusing” section at left (“My name is...”).

Video (14:23 plus 10 minutes for discussion)

Before you start the video, ask participants to review the questions in the Participant’s Guide and to jot down answers to the questions as they view the video.

After the video, discuss participants’ answers to the questions listed in the Participant’s Guide. Provide clarification where needed. Provided below for the first lesson are sample answers taken directly from the video:

By assuming God hears and receives all that we have to offer up in prayer, the good and the bad, the praise and the doubt. God doesn’t censor what we pray.

By giving us the words, the language to name and express the reality of our lives of faith: pain/joy, doubt/thanksgiving, reflection/praise.

Metaphor is the basic building block of psalm poetry. Metaphor comes from the Greek: meta means “trans” or “across,” and phor is from pherein, “to carry.” A metaphor “carries across” or transfers meanings from one thing to another. Metaphor is a figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing in terms that suggest another.

The metaphors of pathway and God as refuge.

[Answers will vary.]

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Activity 1: Psalms as Metaphor

For this activity, you will work in small groups. Your leader will give you instructions. Be prepared to share your group's thoughts with the rest of the class at the end of the activity.

Using old magazines, find and remove pictures that illustrate God as refuge and that illustrate modern cultural definitions of refuge. Using glue sticks, paste your pictures on a large piece of butcher block paper, which has been divided down the middle so that you can contrast these different ideas about refuge.

What differences do you see between God as refuge and our culture's understanding of refuge?

Activity 2: Range of Prayer

Read the following Psalm verses silently:

Psalm 13:1 (lament)
 Psalm 1:6 (wisdom psalm)
 Psalm 23:1 (trust psalm)
 Psalm 30:2 (thanksgiving)
 Psalm 32:5 (penitential lament)
 Psalm 147:1 (praise hymn)

Which verse best expresses what you would pray right now?

Open your Bible and read the whole psalm within which that verse is found.

Your instructor will provide you with further directions about this exercise.

Activity 1: Psalms as Metaphor (20 minutes)

Materials: old magazines, glue sticks, butcher block paper

The purpose of this activity is to get the participants to think about and share with one another some of the relevant ideas and opinions they bring to this study.

Participants will work in small groups for this activity. Ask participants to break into small groups with no more than four members. Tell them they will have 10 minutes to complete the assignment.

Tell the participants:

Using old magazines, rip out pictures that illustrate God as refuge and that illustrate cultural definitions of refuge. Using glue sticks, paste your pictures on a large piece of butcher block paper, which has been divided down the middle so that you can contrast these different ideas about refuge.

Call the class back together and ask a representative from each small group to share a brief presentation of the group's activity.

Allow several minutes for all of the groups to share.

If time permits, you might wish to include this activity:

Activity 2: Range of Prayer (15 minutes)

1. Have the participants silently read the Psalm verses listed at left.

2. Ask them to choose one verse that best expresses what they would pray if praying right now and read that verse several times prayerfully. Next they should open their Bibles and read the whole psalm within which that verse is found.

3. Finally, they should turn to a partner, read the Psalm aloud and share words or images in the Psalm that are particularly powerful and tell why. (Everyone will be talking at once, but no one will notice. Reading the Psalm aloud is one way to understand it better.)

4. When everyone is finished, say: "**Amen! And let the people say Amen!**" Afterwards, tally the number of people who chose each psalm verse. This will gauge the prayer mood of the class.

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Group Discussion

1. Do you have moments of doubt in your walk with God? Are you able to tell God how you are feeling?
2. Are there parts of your life that you are choosing to hide from God? If so, why do you think that is?
3. Is it possible to feel both grateful toward and angry at God?
4. What do you feel when you think about God right now?

If you'd like to try something different, here are two possibilities:

Alternative Activity 1: The Hymnal

Materials: hymnals

1. Have the participants look in the back of a church hymnal, in the index that deals with scripture passages related to the hymns, and count the number of psalms represented in the hymnal.
2. Then let each participant look up one or two of the psalms represented to see what kinds of emotions and thoughts about God are expressed.
3. Ask the participants: **Does the hymnal seem to draw upon the same kind of psalm or upon a wide range of psalms?** Share your findings with the whole class.

Alternative Activity 2: Psalms in Worship

1. Say, **“Think about how Psalms were used in your worship service last week. At what points in the liturgy (worship service) were the psalms used?”**
2. Next week, pay attention to the use of psalms in worship.

Group Discussion (10 minutes)

Allow up to 10 minutes for discussion to help connect this week's material to participants' lives.

Use the questions in the Participant's Guide to start the discussion. If a question does not get a quick response, be patient. Silence is not failure. Remember, allow participants to think during the silence before you introduce a different question.

Conclusion and Closing Prayer **(10 minutes)**

During this first week, you will need to provide guidance to participants on how to use the study guide to prepare for the next class session.

Ask participants to turn to “Preparation for Session 2: The Synagogue, the Church, and the Psalms” in their Participant’s Guide, and then make the following points:

- In the coming week, you will learn about the history of Psalms used in the church by reading Chapter 2 of *Journey Through the Psalms*. Your study guide is designed to help you work through the chapter and apply what you’ve read to your life as a Christian.
- Start by reading the **Learning Objectives**. This will help you target your study and set expectations for what you should learn by the end of the session. For example, by the end of Session 2, you should be able to arrive at a definition of prayer.
- Before you start reading in the text, complete the exercise in **Connecting with Scripture**. The biblical passages and the follow-up question are designed to provide a biblical and spiritual foundation for the week’s study.
- The questions in this section will encourage you to reflect on what the passages and study mean for YOUR life as a Christian. Feel free to write your answers in the space provided.
- The weekly reading from *Journey Through the Psalms* is listed under **Study for this Session**.
- Highlights of the reading and definitions of key terms are provided in the **Study Overview**.
- After you have completed the reading, answer the questions in the grey box, **Personal Reflection**. The purpose of these questions is to help you interpret and use what you have studied within the framework of your beliefs and experiences as a Christian.

Closing Prayer

Pray Psalm 121 together:

**I lift up my eyes to the hills—
Where does my help come from?
My help comes from the LORD,
The Maker of heaven and earth.**

**The LORD will not let your foot slip—
The one who watches over you will not slumber;
Indeed, the one who watches over Israel
Will neither slumber nor sleep.**

**The LORD watches over you—
The LORD is your shade at your right hand;
The sun will not harm you by day,
Nor the moon by night.**

**The LORD will keep you from all harm—
The LORD will watch over your life;
The LORD will watch over your coming and going
Both now and forevermore.**

Amen.

→ If you've downloaded the weekly letter from the website, distribute it now to students. (See p. 8, "Supplemental Materials.")

Answer any questions, distribute materials, and make announcements, as necessary.

Collect the name tents at the end of class and bring them next week.

After all class business has been conducted, tell participants that each class session will be concluded with prayer concerns. Invite participants to share prayer concerns and joys.

Encourage participants to write down the concerns/ joys in their guides and to remember them as they pray during the week.

Lead the closing prayer (at left).

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Preparation for Session 2: The Synagogue, the Church, and the Psalms

Learning Objectives:

At the end of this session, students should be able to:

- Understand the “seasons of life” (Brueggemann).
- Arrive at a definition of prayer.
- Know the basic structure of the book of Psalms.
- Outline the use of Psalms in the history of the church.

Connecting with Scripture:

Read the following two psalms and answer the question in the space provided:

- Psalm 72; 51

What do you think might have been the psalmist's situation as he or she wrote these two psalms? Can you think of parallel situations in your own life?

Study for this Session:

- Read Chapter 2 of *Journey Through the Psalms*.

Page 10 of Participant's Guide**Study Overview:**

The Church throughout its history has drawn upon the psalms. Early Christians preached, sang, and prayed the psalms. Monks in monastic communities through the ages have used the psalms as their central focus. Psalms were adapted for congregational singing during the Reformation, and many congregations today have returned to the use of psalms in liturgy.

The book of Psalms (or the Psalter) as we have it today appears to have been produced over a long period of time, probably centuries. It is divided into five books (like the Pentateuch, the “five books of Moses”), each of which concludes with a doxology, or hymn of praise. Unlike our modern hymnals, the Psalter does not identify the author or date of individual psalms. Seventy-three of the psalms are marked with the words “of David,” but this does not mean that David composed them.

Scholars have identified a number of psalm types: the hymn, the wisdom psalm, the lament, the royal psalm, and the thanksgiving. Each type has its own distinctive form and content.

Walter Brueggemann has identified three seasons of faith expressed by the psalms:

Orientation - the experience of the goodness and order of creation and the blessings of God.

Disorientation - the experience of disorder, suffering, and alienation, during which God appears absent and enemies surround us.

New Orientation - the experience of deliverance - the surprising gift of new life that reverses the pain of disorientation and inspires gratitude to God.

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Personal Reflection - Session 2: The Synagogue, the Church, and the Psalms

As you reflect on this week's readings, consider the following questions:

1. Where do the psalms appear in the worship services of your church?
2. When have you experienced the "seasons" of **orientation, disorientation, and new orientation**?
3. In which "season" do you find yourself now?
4. Is there some pattern to your experience of these seasons?

Class Session 2: The Synagogue, the Church, and the Psalms

Opening Prayer

O God, you are our God; we seek you, we thirst for you, in all the seasons of our life. Receive our prayers of praise and pain, of joy and sorrow, and grant us refuge in the shadow of your wings forever. Amen.

From Psalm 63

Focusing

In groups of 2 or 3, discuss the following question:

Take a minute and complete the phrase, “prayer is _____.” Next, share briefly your reflections on *when, where, what, and how* you pray.

Video, Part I: The Seasons of Faith

As you watch the video, take notes to answer the following questions about the “three seasons”:

1. When in my life have I experienced what each figure is expressing?
2. Which figure best expresses my season of life or faith orientation right now?
3. How might I redraw each figure?
4. What other ways might the “seasons of faith” be depicted?

Opening Prayer (2 minutes)

Either pray in unison or ask someone from the class to pray the prayer aloud while others pray silently.

Focusing (10 minutes)

Put a list of responses to the first question on a flip chart. Have the participants share their reflections on *when, where, what, and how* they pray.

Video (14:40 plus 10 minutes for discussion)

Note that you will be prompted to pause the video after this section, which features the drawing of the “three figures at prayer.”

(Prompt to pause the video occurs here.)

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Video, Part 2: Quilting the Seasons

Analyze the 3 panels of the quilt in terms of the seasons of faith they express. Then discuss the following questions:

1. How does this expression of the seasons of faith differ from the previous one?
2. What new outlook on the seasons of faith does the quilt give you?
3. Which expression do you identify with more closely? Why do you think that is?

Exercise: Human Continuum

Place yourselves on a human prayer continuum. One end of the room represents one end of the continuum: **Strongly Agree**. The other end represents the opposite: **Strongly Disagree**.

Respond to each of the following statements by locating yourself physically between the two ends of the room. Be as honest as possible.

1. *God expects you to accept patiently whatever life dishes out.*
2. *God sometimes hides from you to test your faith or teach you a lesson.*
3. *God begrudgingly tolerates your questions and emotional outbursts.*
4. *God welcomes your questions and emotions in prayer.*
5. *Questioning or challenging God is a sin.*
6. *Questioning or challenging God reflects a weak and wavering faith.*
7. *Questioning or challenging God signifies trust in God's love and God's concern for you.*

After this exercise, discuss how your responses to these questions shed light on your theology, that is, your understanding of God and God's character.

Video, Part 2: Quilting the Seasons

(5 minutes)

You will need to "un-pause" the video now to watch the final segment, which presents the "three seasons of faith" quilt. Have the participants analyze the three panels of the quilt in terms of the seasons of faith they express.

Exercise: Human Continuum

(15 minutes)

Read the instructions at left aloud to the class, making clear which side of the room represents "Strongly Agree" and which represents "Strongly Disagree."

Standing out of the way, read each question (at left, in italics) and ask class members to move to the spot on an imaginary line between the two extreme positions that represents what they think. Pause briefly, then read the second question (and so on).

Ask the class, "How did these questions (and your answers to them) shed light on your theology?"

You might also ask, "About which questions are the answers most similar? Most varied?"

Alternative Activities

These may be used in place of or to supplement the above activity if you have extra time.

Alternative Activity 1: (10 minutes)

Materials: Bibles

Have the participants read Ps. 72.20: “The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended” at the conclusion of Book II of the Psalter. Most of the psalms within Books I and II of the Psalter bear the superscription “leDavid,” meaning “a psalm of/to/for David.” Have the participants look for other psalms of David in psalms 73-150 (Books III, IV, and V). Discuss the meaning of “leDavid” in the psalms.

Alternative Activity 2: (15-20 minutes)

Materials: Bibles

Look at the superscription (the small type immediately above the first verse) in Ps. 51 and then read 2 Sam 11-12. Have the participants discuss how Ps. 51 makes sense in the situation David was facing in 2 Samuel. Have the participants skim the Psalms for other superscriptions and discuss how they help or do not help to illumine the meaning of the psalms to which they are attached.

Alternative Activity 3: (10 minutes)

Materials: Bibles

Have the participants look in their Bibles for italicized words or words in a different font that are not included in the Psalm verses or in the smaller type of the superscription above each psalm. These are editorial comments from the publisher of the English translation of your Bible.

Ask them whether the editorial additions help to make sense of each psalm or interfere with the study of the psalm?

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Group Discussion

1. How does your prayer posture reflect your understanding of prayer? What posture(s) do you prefer? Why these?
2. Has reading psalms for this class in some way changed your view of prayer? The way you pray?
3. Tell about something (e.g., music, painting, sculpture, poetry) that illustrates your own understanding of prayer or of the seasons of faith.

Closing Prayer

Read Psalm 15 together:

**O LORD, who may abide in your tent?
 Who may dwell on your holy hill?
 Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is
 right, and speak the truth from their heart;
 who do not slander with their tongue, and do no
 evil to their friends, nor take up a reproach
 against their neighbors;
 in whose eyes the wicked are despised, but who
 honor those who fear the LORD;
 who stand by their oath even to their hurt;
 who do not lend money at interest, and do not
 take a bribe against the innocent.
 Those who do these things shall never be moved.**

Amen.

Group Discussion (10 minutes)

Allow up to 10 minutes for discussion to help connect this week's material to participants' lives.

Use the questions in the Participant's Guide (at left) to start the discussion. If a question does not get a quick response, be patient. Allow participants to think during the silence before you introduce a different question.

**Conclusion & Closing Prayer
(5 minutes)**

Ask participants to turn to "Preparation for Session 3: Your Hallelujahs Don't Have to Be Hollow Anymore" in their Participant's Guide and briefly review the assigned study. Answer any questions and make announcements, as necessary.

Invite participants to share prayer concerns and joys. Encourage participants to write down the concerns / joys in their guides and to remember them as they pray during the week.

Ask a volunteer to lead the closing prayer.

*Preparation for Session 3:
Your Hallelujahs Don't Have to Be Hollow Anymore*

Learning Objectives:

At the end of this session, students should be able to:

- Outline the general structure of the “hymn psalm.”
- Understand what our praise says about God and what it does for God, for others, and for us.
- Analyze the correlation between the psalms and hymnody. (If we are what we sing, then is what we sing in tune with the psalms?)
- Describe how praise critiques our present experience and the experience of others in our world.
- Create a communal collage.
- Write a hymn of praise in the spirit of the psalmists.

Connecting with Scripture:

“Hymn Psalms” have the following structure:

- A. Call to praise
- B. Motive or reasons for praise
- C. Renewed call to praise

For example, Psalm 117:

- A. “Praise the Lord” (Ps. 117:1)
- B. “For/because...” (Ps. 117:2a, b)
- C. “Praise the LORD!” (Ps. 117:2c)

Look for this same structure in the following psalms:

- Psalm 33; 46; 48; 146; 150

Page 16 of Participant's Guide**Study for this Session:**

- Read Chapter 3 of *Journey Through the Psalms*.

Study Overview:

Praise is at the heart of authentic worship, not an afterthought or prelude to petition. In praising God, we learn about God, ourselves, and our place in the world. Praise reminds us of our dependence on God, who is our creator and source of the infinite possibilities that are set before us.

In praise we know who we are and whose we are. This is the message of Psalm 100:3: “Know that Adonai (the Lord) is God. It is Adonai who made us and we are God’s. We are God’s people and the sheep of God’s pasture.” Praise is both the beginning and the goal of authentic worship.

The Hebrew word “hallelujah” literally means, “Praise the Lord.” Psalms of praise identify certain characteristics of God: God the creator of the world and of Israel as a nation; God the sovereign and ruler over all things; and God, the God of Zion. Psalm hymns always give the reason for our praise.

Praise can function both positively and negatively. Praise that ignores the pain of the world to keep order is idolatrous. Psalm praise holds up God’s intention for the world and critiques the present, pushing us to acts of transformation.

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Personal Reflection - Session 3: Your Hallelujahs Don't Have to Be Hollow Anymore

As you reflect on the experience of praise, please consider the following:

1. Where, when, and how have you praised God?
2. What body movements best express your feeling of praise and gratitude?
3. Do you think your praises and actions really make a difference to God? Why or why not?
4. What is happening in your life or in your church today that makes it difficult to praise God?
5. What are you or your church doing to sing God's praises in the midst of these challenges?

Class Session 3: Your Hallelujahs Don't Have to Be Hollow Anymore

Opening Prayer

How good it is to sing praises to our God! For God is gracious and a song of praise is fitting. God heals, God creates, God listens. Help us to praise you in all that we do, O Lord. Amen

From Psalm 147

Focusing

In small groups, briefly describe a moment in your past when you felt that you had experienced true praise of God.

Video

As you watch the video, take notes to answer the following questions:

1. Why is it dangerous to rely too much on “experts”?
2. Why is God “praiseworthy”?
3. What images from the “hymn of praise” video seem particularly striking? Do any seem out of place?

Opening Prayer (2 minutes)

Either pray in unison or ask someone from the class to pray the prayer aloud while others pray silently.

Focusing (5 minutes)

Divide the class into small groups and ask participants to “describe a moment in your past when you felt that you had experienced true praise of God” (as at left).

Video (13:28 plus 10 minutes for discussion)

Before you start the video, ask participants to review the questions in the Participant's Guide and to jot answers to the questions as they view the video.

After the video, discuss participants' answers to the questions listed in the Participant's Guide. Provide clarification as needed.

Allow ten minutes for discussion. Then proceed to the Activity.

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Activity

Select one or two images from the video that inspire you to praise. Share these with the class.

From the list the leader writes on the board, choose one or two items around which you will write your own hymn of praise, following the structure of the hymn psalm (p. 15 of the Participant's Guide). Four to eight sentences ought to be enough to express praise within the hymn structure. Share your hymn psalm with the class if you so choose.

Respond to each hymn shared by your classmate with "Praise God," "Hallelujah," or some other suitable phrase.

Activity (15 minutes)

Ask students which image in the video would inspire them to praise God. Write these on a flipchart or chalk board.

Read aloud the instructions at left. Give students ten minutes to complete the assignment. If time permits, ask students who wish to read their hymn psalms to the class.

As indicated at left, instruct the participants to respond to each hymn shared by their classmates with "Praise God," "Hallelujah," or some other suitable phrase.

Alternative Activities

These may be used in place of or to supplement the above activity if you have extra time.

Alternative Activity 1: Prayer of Praise (10-15 min.)

Materials: Words written before class on the board or flipchart: "O God, receive our praise and bless us with your presence."

Tell the participants to skim through the psalms starting anywhere they'd like and identify several psalms of praise or praise verses within other types of psalms. As they skim, they should jot down one or two verses of praise that express most closely their own feelings and thoughts. Focus upon these verses by reading them prayerfully again and again.

After 5 minutes, start off with your own verses of praise. Direct the group to respond in unison with the following: "O God, receive our praise and bless us with your presence." When each who wishes to share his or her verse(s) has had a chance to do so and the group has responded with the refrain, say, "**Amen! And let all the people say Amen!**"

Acknowledgement: This exercise is taken from *Praying and Teaching the Psalms* by Donald Griggs (Abingdon, 1984), pp. 23-24.

Group Discussion

1. Local churches praise God, not only in Sunday worship but in many different ways: e.g., community service, musical programs, social events. In what ways does your church praise God?
2. Think about your private worship and your Sunday worship. In what ways could your own praise and that of your church be made more powerful?
3. What difference does it make to praise God with other people?
4. Thinking back to the video clip, what are signs in your life, your church or your community that all is not well with God's order? Where is God not being praised?

Alternative Activity 2: Communal Praise Collage (15 min.)

Note: This exercise is also found on p. 44 of the textbook.

Materials: colored construction paper, glue, tape, a long sheet of mural paper hung on one wall horizontally with masking tape or taped to the blackboard.

Have the participants read Psalm 150 out loud together. Then ask the class to concentrate on the images and colors that come to mind as they listen to the words while they are read again.

Two participants will read alternate verses as the others tear pieces of construction paper into shapes that express each verse and glue or tape them on the wall or blackboard.

When they have finished, have them step back and look at the psalm which they have now expressed in form and color.

Group Discussion (10 minutes)

Allow up to 10 minutes for discussion to help connect this week's material to participants' lives.

Use the questions in the Participant's Guide (at left) to start the discussion. If a question does not get a quick response, be patient. Allow participants to think during the silence before you introduce a different question.

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Closing Prayer

Read Psalm 146 together:

**Praise the LORD!
 Praise the LORD, O my soul!
 I will praise the LORD as long as I live;
 I will sing praises to my God all my life long.
 Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in
 whom there is no help.
 When their breath departs, they return to the
 earth; on that very day their plans perish.
 Happy are those whose help is the God of
 Jacob,
 whose hope is in the LORD their God,
 who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all
 that is in them;
 who keeps faith forever;
 who executes justice for the oppressed;
 who gives food to the hungry.
 The LORD sets the prisoners free; the LORD
 opens the eyes of the blind.
 The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
 the LORD loves the righteous.
 The LORD watches over the strangers;
 the LORD upholds the orphan and the widow,
 but the way of the wicked is brought to ruin.
 The LORD will reign forever, your God, O
 Zion,
 for all generations.
 Praise the LORD!**

Amen.

Conclusion and Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Ask participants to turn to "Preparation for Session 4: "You Get What You Deserve" in their Participant's Guide and briefly review the assigned study. Assign them to read chapter 4 of the text and wisdom Psalms 1; 37; and 73.

Answer any questions, distribute materials, and make announcements, as necessary.

Invite participants to share prayer concerns and joys. Encourage participants to write down the concerns / joys in their guides and to remember them as they pray during the week.

Ask a volunteer to lead the closing prayer.

Page 21 of Participant's Guide*Preparation for Session 4: You Get What You Deserve, Don't You?***Learning Objectives:**

At the end of this session, students should be able to:

- Describe the “wisdom world view.”
- Identify ways in which the wisdom world view is articulated in our society through proverbs, advertisements, etc.
- Identify times in one’s own life when one responded to or evaluated a situation in terms of "you get what you deserve."
- Explain how Psalm 73 serves as an example of wisdom thinking.

Connecting with Scripture:

Read the following psalms and answer the question in the space provided.

Psalm 1

How would you define “the righteous” and “the wicked” in Psalm 1?

Does Psalm 1 give you comfort or make you uncomfortable? Why?

Is Psalm 1 true to your experience? Explain.

Psalm 37

Is the message of Psalm 37 positive or negative for you?

What personal observations does the psalmist offer to support the advice given?

What is your reaction to this advice?

Psalm 73

What problem does the psalmist address?

How are the wicked described?

What is the key word of the psalm?

Where is the turning point of the psalm?

What do you think is the primary message of Psalm 73?

Page 22 of Participant's Guide**Study for this Session:**

- Read Chapter 4 of *Journey Through the Psalms*.

Study Overview:

When tragedy strikes us or others, we often look for an explanation. We may say, “Why me?” - which is a way of asking, “What did I do to deserve this?” Following the terrorist attacks of September 11th, many of us asked these questions, and we discerned many different answers. Questions about the interrelationship of **act and consequence** (that is, we do something, and something good or bad happens to us because of it) permeate the Bible, particularly Deuteronomy, the prophets, Proverbs, the parables of Jesus, and the apocalyptic texts of Daniel and Revelation.

The wisdom psalms attempt to explain the relationship between act and consequence from a position of orientation and orderliness, represented by the theme of the Two Ways: goodness leads to health and prosperity, while evil leads to poverty and illness. We can characterize “wisdom” thinking as:

Anthropocentric: centered on human beings rather than on God

Pragmatic: good and bad are defined in terms of what yields practical results

Experiential: learning comes from experience

Universal: all persons can experience wisdom

Optimistic: success in life can be cultivated by the right attitudes and behavior

Wisdom can be defined as the search for the God-given order in the world. Proverbs sum up this order in short sayings; bumper stickers are our modern proverbs.

Page 23 of Participant's Guide**Personal Reflection – Session 4: You Get What You Deserve, Don't You?**

As you reflect on the readings and the concept of act/consequence, consider the following questions and be prepared to share your thoughts during class.

1. Why is there suffering? Are there different kinds of suffering with different causes?
2. What explanations for suffering and evil have you heard from Christians? From people who are not Christians?
3. What proverbs do you live by?
4. "Bumper sticker thinking" is often negative, even sarcastic. ("My kid beat up your honor student.") How and why is this different from "wisdom" thinking?

Class Session 4: You Get What You Deserve, Don't You?

Opening Prayer

The Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. Guide us along the path of righteousness, O God, so that we may follow your way in the world. Amen.

From Psalm 1

Focusing

In small groups, answer the question, "In your experience, do people get what they deserve?"

Video

As you watch the video, take notes to answer the following questions:

1. What are proverbs?
2. What are some of the main themes of wisdom writing?
3. Which season (orientation, disorientation, new orientation) do proverbs express?
4. What is "act/consequence"?

5. What pithy sayings sum up life today in America?

Opening Prayer (2 minutes)

Either pray in unison or ask someone from the class to pray the prayer aloud while others pray silently.

Focusing (5 minutes)

Ask participants to form small groups and answer the question at left ("In your experience, do people get what they deserve?").

Video (11:45 plus 10 minutes for discussion)

Before you start the video, ask participants to review the questions in the Participant's Guide and to jot answers to the questions as they view the video.

- How do traditional proverbs and bumper stickers differ in tone?

Activity: Acrostic Poem Wall

In an “acrostic” psalm, the first letter of every verse or every other verse is a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, a technique that affirms God’s order in the world.

The class will write an acrostic psalm using the English alphabet. Each member of the class (or teams of two if the class is large) counts off a letter of the alphabet in order beginning with the letter “A.”

Then the person or team writes a verse beginning with that letter to express a wisdom theme or the wisdom world view, for example, the "Two Ways."

Each verse is written on a sheet of 8" x 11" construction paper. Tape each piece (in alphabetical order) to a wall so that the class can pray the psalm together.

Begin the prayer with: “O God of order, receive our prayer,” and end with “Amen.” For more information on acrostic psalms, see page 70 of the textbook.

Group Discussion

- In what ways do we affirm an “act/consequence” way of thinking in our daily lives?
- In what ways does the church reinforce the belief that we get what we deserve?

Activity: Acrostic Poem Wall (15 minutes)

Materials: 26 sheets of 8" x 11" construction paper, tape

Review with the class the directions at left.

In smaller classes, participants might have to take multiple letters to complete the entire alphabet.

It would be a good idea to come to class prepared with two or three examples, such as:

A -- A penny saved is a penny earned.

B -- Being good is its own reward.

C -- “Can do” is the attitude of winners.

Alternative Activity (15 minutes)

Discuss participants’ answers to the “Connecting with Scripture” section on p. 21 of the Participant’s Guide.

Group Discussion (10 minutes)

As before, allow up to 10 minutes for discussion to help connect this week’s material to participants’ lives.

Use the questions in the Participant’s Guide (at left) to start the discussion. If a question does not get a quick response, be patient. Allow participants to think during the silence before you introduce a different question.

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3. Is the idea of “act/consequence” helpful or unhelpful? What are its limitations? Its dangers?

Closing Prayer

Pray the following selections from Psalm 19 together:

**The heavens are telling the glory of God; and
the firmament proclaims God's handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech, and night to
night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words; their
voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.
The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the
soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure,
making wise the simple.
the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring
forever;
the ordinances of the LORD are true and
righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold, even
much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and
drippings of the honeycomb.
But who can detect their errors? Clear me
from hidden faults.
Keep back your servant also from the insolent;
do not let them have dominion over me.
Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of
great transgression.
Let the words of my mouth and the meditation
of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD,
my rock and my redeemer.**

Amen.

Conclusion and Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Ask participants to turn to “Preparation for Session 5: Complaining in Faith to God” in their Participant's Guide and briefly review the assigned study. They should also read Psalms 17; 22; 44; 64; 73; and 88.

Invite participants to share prayer concerns and joys. Ask a volunteer to lead the closing prayer.

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Preparation for Session 5: Complaining in Faith to God

Learning Objectives:

At the end of this session, students should be able to:

- Outline the basic structure of the lament psalm and note the movement within that structure.
- Articulate and share one's own "pit experiences."
- Compare one's definition of prayer with the psalm lament in order to surface differences, commonalities, and problematic issues in prayer, such as anger toward enemies and God.
- Explore the possibilities for the use of laments in our liturgies, especially through sacred dance and art.
- Reflect upon the way in which society and the church respond to the pain of disorientation in people's lives.
- Understand the connection between spirituality and justice.

Connecting with Scripture:

Skim the following psalms. Look for metaphors (figures of speech) that convey the psalmist's suffering or that describe the psalmist's enemies. Then answer the question in the space provided.

- Psalm 17; 22; 44; 64; 73; 88

Do these psalms surprise you? Why or why not?

How do you feel when you read them?

Study for this Session:

- Read Chapter 5 of *Journey Through the Psalms*.

Page 28 of Participant's Guide**Study Overview:**

Many Christians wonder if they can honestly share their doubts and complaints with God. They believe that whatever the difficulties of life, they have no right to be angry at God or to question God's justice. Further, in a culture that thrives on success, the disorienting experiences of sickness and death are often minimized or denied altogether.

The psalms of lament serve as an antidote to such narrow and destructive understandings of our relationship with God. Far from being hopeless or pessimistic, the psalms of lament enable the church to speak truthfully about human experience and the life of faith. These psalms remind us that pain and suffering are universal both on the personal and social level. They challenge us not to explain away suffering, but to acknowledge and affirm the pain that we and others experience.

The psalms of lament not only express the experience of hardship and pain, but also appeal to God to change our life circumstances. Although God may seem absent during times of pain and injustice, the Psalmist's lament is grounded in the belief that God cares and that God will act to change the situation.

The lament psalms speak of "enemies." This "enemy language" reminds us of the injustice of the world, compels us to explore the sources of injustice, and asserts that God's ultimate aim is just and righteous. This language is filled with emotional intensity and urgency because this life matters and God's purpose for us matters.

Lament psalms also affirm that anger at God is not a sign of impiety or faithlessness, but an acknowledgment of God's importance in our lives. The psalms present us with a God big enough to accept the whole range of our emotional lives.

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Personal Reflection – Session 5: Complaining in Faith to God

As you reflect on lament, consider the following questions and be prepared to share your thoughts during class.

1. Do you think it is okay to be angry with God? Why or why not? Have you every prayed an angry lament?
2. Do you think God causes bad things to happen? Explain.
3. Why do you think innocent people suffer?

Class Session 5: Complaining in Faith to God

Opening Prayer

To you, O Lord, we call; our rock, we know that you will not refuse to hear us, even in our pain and anger. Give us the courage to be honest with you and with one another on this journey. Amen.

From Psalm 28

Focusing

Break into groups of 2 or 3 and discuss the following questions:

Describe a time in which you or someone you know felt angry at God. How was that anger expressed?

Video

As you watch the video, take notes to answer the following questions:

1. What is the Hebrew title for the whole book of Psalms? What does it mean?
2. How many of the 150 psalms are laments? Of that number, how many ask for forgiveness? How many, therefore, are angry laments?
3. In what sense do angry laments praise God?

Opening Prayer (2 minutes)

Either pray in unison or ask someone from the class to pray the prayer aloud while others pray silently.

Focusing (5 minutes)

Ask participants to form small groups and answer the question at left (“Describe a time in which you or someone you know felt angry at God. How was that anger expressed?”).

It is helpful to acknowledge that some participants might find this question difficult to discuss. It is important to tell class members to share only what they feel comfortable and believe appropriate to discuss with others.

Video (10:59 plus 10 minutes for discussion)

As always, before you start the video, ask participants to review the questions in the Participant's Guide and to jot answers to the questions as they view the video. Because these questions are fairly technical in nature, sample answers are provided below:

The word is tehillim, which means praises. This word comes from the Hebrew root halal, from which we get the word hallelujah, or praise the Lord.

Nearly 1/3 of the 150 psalms in the book of psalms are laments, and of those, only 7 are penitential laments, that is, they ask forgiveness from God for sin. Twenty three of out 30 are angry laments.

They are directed to the One whom the psalmist believes cares, hears, and has the power to do something to change the psalmist's situation of suffering.

Page 31 of Participant's Guide**Activity: Lament**

Look in your church's hymnal index to find hymns based on lament psalms.

List of Lament Psalms				
3	6	7	10	12
13	14	17	22	25
26	28	35	36	38
41	43	44	51	54
55	58	59	64	69
71	74	79	86	88
94	102	109	120	129
141	142	143		

Go back to the lament upon which the hymn is based and compare the hymn and psalm. Have any parts of the lament been removed? If so, what does this do to the meaning of the lament?

Activity: Lament (15 minutes)

Materials: Hymnals that include Scripture index (usually in the back pages of the hymnal)

Review directions at left with the class. It would be helpful for you to find an example in advance to show the class how the exercise is to be completed.

Alternative Activity: Communal Lament Collage (15-20 minutes)

Materials: glue/tape, mural paper, magazines and newspapers

Have the participants glue and tape onto the mural paper pictures and headlines (torn out of magazines and newspapers) that challenge the optimistic wisdom world view of order.

Everyone should work at once (or as many people as possible), so that the result is a truly random arrangement.

When you are finished, discuss how society and the church respond to the disorientation depicted in the collage and how each participant's church deals with this kind of pain within its worship services and its ministry.

Group Discussion

1. Think back to a time when you suffered from either physical or mental pain, from enemies, or from feeling abandoned by God. How did you feel about God? How did you express how you felt about God to God in prayer?
2. Do you feel free to pray angry laments? Why or why not?
3. Do you think there is a place in worship for banners like the one you saw in the video? Why or why not?

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Closing Prayer

Pray Psalm 54 together:

Save me, O God, by your name, and vindicate me by your might.

Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth.

For the insolent have risen against me, the ruthless seek my life; they do not set God before them.

But surely, God is my helper; the LORD is the upholder of my life.

God will repay my enemies for their evil.

In your faithfulness, put an end to them.

With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you; I will give thanks to your name, O LORD, for it is good.

For God has delivered me from every trouble, and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies.

Amen.

Group Discussion (10 minutes)

Allow up to 10 minutes for discussion to help connect this week's material to participants' lives.

Use the questions in the Participant's Guide (at left) to start the discussion. If a question does not get a quick response, be patient. Allow participants to think during the silence before you introduce a different question.

Conclusion and Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Ask participants to turn to "Preparation for Session 6: Life in the Meanwhile" in their Participant's Guide and briefly review the assigned study.

Answer any questions, distribute materials, and make announcements, as necessary.

Invite participants to share prayer concerns and joys.

Ask a volunteer to lead the group in the closing prayer.

Page 33 of Participant's Guide***Preparation for Session 6: Life in the Meanwhile*****Learning Objectives:**

At the end of this session, students should be able to:

- Recognize how the movement within the laments from complaint to praise is an expression of the good news of the Gospel.
- Understand the metaphorical nature of lament poetry.
- Recognize how the laments can be vehicles for healing and wholeness.
- Write and pray one's own individual lament and join in a communal lament in the spirit of the psalmists.
- Redefine faith by considering the laments.

Connecting with Scripture:

Read the following passages and answer the questions in the space provided.

- Psalm 13; 41; 44; 88

What problems are the psalmists grappling with? Do you see yourself or your community or country (as in Psalm 44) dealing with the same issues?

Study for this Session:

- Read Chapter 6 of *Journey Through the Psalms*.

Page 34 of Participant's Guide**Study Overview:**

The psalms of lament challenge our narrow definition of faith. Lament as a process moves from complaint to praise and from desperation to joy. It is this movement that embraces all the seasons of life. To see praise as the only - or the most authentic - manifestation of our faith is to render our relationship with God and our spiritual lives superficial. To push too quickly through the process of lament is to short-cut our healing and to ignore the pain of “life in the meanwhile.”

The reality of divine listening brings healing to the one who laments and invites us to listen to the pain of others. As theologian Nelle Morton notes, “we hear each other into speech” and thus are empowered to face the challenges of life. Finding the words to express our pain helps us to overcome our suffering. In contrast, to become speechless and alone is to experience spiritual death.

The psalms of lament remind us that we can take our whole lives to God and that doubt and despair are integral to our relationship with God and to our own spiritual healing. This is true on both the individual and communal levels.

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Personal Reflection – Session 6: Life in the Meanwhile

As you reflect on the readings and the process of lamenting, consider the following questions and be prepared to share your thoughts during class.

1. Have you ever felt that God was far away or absent? What was happening in your life at the time? What did you pray?
2. Does God test us? If so, how? If not, why not?
3. Are you comfortable sharing your pain? Why or why not? Are you comfortable when others share their pain with you?

Class Session 6: Life in the Meanwhile

Opening Prayer

Out of the depths we cry to you, O Lord, hear our prayer. We know that with you is great power to redeem. Grace us with your forgiveness. Amen.

From Psalm 130

Focusing

Read aloud Psalm 51, a penitential (asking for forgiveness) lament. Then read aloud Psalm 13 (or 17), an angry lament. Briefly discuss the following question: "Is one of these psalms more appropriate for worship than the other?"

Video

As you watch the video, take notes to answer the following questions:

1. Did the dance and music both capture the essence of the psalm for you? Why or why not?
2. Could you discern the movement within the psalm from complaint to praise in the dance and the music?
3. What if anything disturbed you about the interpretation of the psalm?

Opening Prayer (2 minutes)

Either pray in unison or ask someone from the class to pray the prayer aloud while others pray silently.

Focusing (5 minutes)

Ask two volunteers to read Psalm 51 and 13.

Ask the class the question at left ("Is one of these Psalms more appropriate for worship than the other?")

Video (9:46 plus 10 minutes for discussion)

Before you start the video, ask participants to review the questions in the Participant's Guide and to jot answers to the questions as they view the video.

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Activity: Composing a Lament

Working individually, make a list of your problems, fears, frustrations, and angers, or make a list of sins that need to be confessed to God. Using the lament structure (in the box below), write an individual lament as briefly and honestly as possible.

Structure of a Lament Psalm

1. Address to God (short, emotion-packed: "My God")
2. Complaint Proper (define the problem, your suffering)
3. Petition (what you want God to do)
4. Motivation (why God should hear your prayer)
5. Confession of trust in God (usually introduced by "But")
6. Concluding vow of praise

When everyone is finished writing, the class leader will say, "Let us pray." You will then read your prayer silently. After this time of silence, the whole group will pray aloud together these words from Psalm 70:

"You are my help and my deliverer; Lord, do not delay. Amen."

Activity: Composing a Lament (20 minutes)

Review the directions at left with the class.

You might find it helpful to have reviewed *Journey Through the Psalms*, Chapter 5, before attempting to lead the class in this exercise.

Note the instruction to the leader at left. It is up to the leader to decide when to finish the time of prayer by beginning to recite the quotation from Psalm 70 at left ("**You are my help and my deliverer; Lord, do not delay. Amen.**").

Alternative Activities

These may be used in place of or to supplement the above activity if you have extra time.

Alternative Activity 1: Communal Laments Today (10-15 minutes)

Materials: Bibles

Read Psalm 74 or 79. Discuss these communal lament psalms in light of the contemporary global situation. What positive and negative political consequences do these psalms suggest?

Group Discussion

1. What would you say to someone who feels as if God has left them or who is having doubts about God?
2. Is there ever a time when lamenting isn't appropriate? At what point does lamenting become whining?

Alternative Activity 2: Good Friday Laments (15 minutes)

Materials: Textbook (*Journey Through the Psalms*)

Have the participants read aloud the Service of Silence and Lamentation for Good Friday in the Appendix of the text, pages 154-161.

Group Discussion (10 minutes)

Allow up to 10 minutes for discussion to help connect this week's material to participants' lives.

Use the questions in the Participant's Guide (at left) to start the discussion. If a question does not get a quick response, be patient. Allow participants to think during the silence before you introduce a different question.

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Closing Prayer

Read this selection from Psalm 5 together:

**Give ear to my words, O LORD; give heed to my
sighing.
O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice; in the
morning I plead my case to you, and watch.
For you are not a God who delights in wickedness;
evil will not sojourn with you.
The boastful will not stand before your eyes; you hate
all evildoers.
You destroy those who speak lies; the LORD abhors
the bloodthirsty and deceitful.
But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love,
will enter your house,
I will bow down toward your holy temple in awe of
you.
Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness because of
my enemies; make your way straight before me.
For there is no truth in their mouths; their hearts are
destruction; their throats are open graves; they
flatter with their tongues.
Make them bear their guilt, O God; let them fall by
their own counsels.
But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them
ever sing for joy.
For you bless the righteous, O LORD; you cover them
with favor as with a shield.**

Amen.

Conclusion and Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Ask participants to turn to "Preparation for Session 7: The Lord Reigns. Enthronement Psalms" in their Participant's Guide and briefly review the assigned study.

Invite participants to share prayer concerns and joys. Ask a volunteer to lead the closing prayer.

Read this selection from Psalm 5 together.

Page 39 of Participant's Guide**Preparation for Session 7: The Lord Reigns: Enthronement Psalms****Learning Objectives:**

At the end of this session, students should be able to:

- Reflect upon the ways the enthronement psalms judge and transform our present with their picture of a new world governed by God.
- Experiment with choral speaking of psalms.

Connecting with Scripture:

Read the following psalms:

- Psalm 47; 93; 96-99

What excites you or gives you hope in these enthronement psalms? Why?

Study for this Session:

- Read Chapter 7, pp. 133-34 and 140-153 of *Journey Through the Psalms*.

Study Overview:

Enthronement psalms declare God sovereign over the created world. “All the earth” is called to “sing a new song” to the Lord (Psalm 96:1). This new song expresses the new orientation that God inaugurates as God takes the throne to judge the world. Such judgment can be received as good news or as threat depending upon who announces it, receives it, and believes it.

The eschatological (end of time) pictures painted by the enthronement psalms show the world as God intends it to be. By comparison, this new world of righteousness and justice criticizes the world as it is and points us toward transformation. Christians celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus as evidence from God of the world’s future transformation.

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Choral speaking of the enthronement psalms, with scripting (solo, group, or unison voices, high or low, male or female voices) and choreography (when and where speakers stand, where and how they look, hand movements, etc.) can help us to understand these psalms in a new way and embrace their message of new life and possibility.

**Personal Reflection – Session 7: The Lord Reigns.
Enthronement Psalms**

As you reflect on the enthronement psalms, consider the following questions and be prepared to share your thoughts during class.

1. What do the enthronement psalms say to you about God?
2. Which are your favorite enthronement Psalms? Why these?
3. Enthronement psalms assert that God is sovereign; that is, that God is above all and in charge/in control of everything. How can enthronement psalms be true given all that is wrong in today's world?

Class Session 7: The Lord Reigns: Enthronement Psalms

Opening Prayer

O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord all the earth! For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised. O Lord of new beginnings and resurrection, help us to reflect your reign of righteousness in the world. Amen.

From Psalm 96

Focusing

In small groups, discuss the following questions:

In what ways do we resist or challenge God's rule over the world? Why?

Video

As you watch the video, take notes to answer the following questions:

1. What structure do enthronement psalms follow?
2. Which type of orientation does an enthronement psalm express?
3. How did choral speaking seem to change the people performing it?

Acknowledgement: The leader of the choral speaking exercise depicted on the video is **Fredericka Berger**, who for many years was Lecturer in Religion and Drama at Wesley Theological Seminary.

Opening Prayer (2 minutes)

Either pray in unison or ask someone from the class to pray the prayer aloud while others pray silently.

Focusing (5 minutes)

Divide the class into small groups.

Ask the class to discuss the question at left ("In what ways do we resist or challenge God's rule over the world? Why?").

Video (11:13 plus 10 minutes for discussion)

Before you start the video, ask participants to review the questions in the Participant's Guide and to jot answers to the questions as they view the video.

Page 42 of Participant's Guide**Activity: Choral Speaking**

You will script and choreograph the choral speaking of Psalm 93 as it is outlined by Fredericka Berger on pages 145-147 of the textbook. Numbers (1, 2, 3) refer to solo voices and letters (A, B, C) refer to designated groups of people.

When choreographing the Psalm, consider where speakers stand, how they are turned, and where they look. Practice as a group at least twice.

Discuss how your understanding of the psalm changed as you participated in the choral speaking.

Group Discussion

1. What are some of the key points or phrases in enthronement psalms?
2. If we treated God as God is described in enthronement psalms, how would it change us? Our world?
3. How could enthronement psalms be used to keep things as they are (whether for good or for bad)?
4. How might your understanding of Easter change after reading enthronement Psalms?

Activity: Choral Speaking (20 minutes)

Prior to class, carefully preview pages 145-147 of Journey Through the Psalms. It would also be useful to preview the choral speaking segment on the Session 7 video.

Needless to say, the manner in which Psalm 93 is performed will vary greatly according to group size, character of the physical space, and so on.

Group Discussion (10 minutes)

Allow up to 10 minutes for discussion to help connect this week's material to participants' lives.

Use the questions in the Participant's Guide (at left) to start the discussion. If a question does not get a quick response, be patient. Allow participants to think during the silence before you introduce a different question.

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Closing Prayer

Pray Psalm 47 together:

**Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with
loud songs of joy.
For the LORD, the Most High, is awesome, a great
king over all the earth.
God subdued peoples under us, and nations under
our feet.
God chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob
whom God loves.
God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the
sound of a trumpet.
Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our
King, sing praises.
For God is the king of all the earth; sing praises with
a psalm.
God is king over the nations; God sits on the holy
throne.
The princes of the peoples gather as the people of the
God of Abraham.
For the shields of the earth belong to God; God is
highly exalted.

Amen.**

Conclusion and Closing Prayer
(5 minutes)

Ask participants to turn to “Preparation for Session 8: I’ll Never Be the Same Again” in their Participant’s Guide and briefly review the assigned study.

Invite participants to share prayer concerns and joys.
Ask a volunteer to lead the closing prayer.

Pray Psalm 47 together.

Page 44 of Participant's Guide**Preparation for Session 8: I'll Never be the Same Again****Learning Objectives:**

At the end of this session, students should be able to:

- Outline the structure of the thanksgiving psalm and understand the function and power of giving thanks.
- Reflect upon how thanksgiving keeps one open to what is new and transforming.
- Write one's own thanksgivings in the spirit of the psalmists.

Connecting with Scripture:

Read the following passages and answer the question in the space provided below:

- Psalm 30; 107; 8

Each of these is in some way a psalm of “new orientation.” What is the new reality that each describes?

Psalm 30:

Psalm 107:

Psalm 8:

Study for this Session:

- Read Chapter 7, pp. 135-140 of *Journey Through the Psalms*.

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Study Overview:

Lament is not the final word in the psalms. Pain is real and can never be denied or glossed over, but disorientation gives way to new orientation, chaos to order, and despair to joy. New orientation is the surprising gift from God that emerges out of the pit of pain and dislocation.

New orientation does not deny the impact of pain and loss, but places it in the wider perspective of divine care. Pain and grief change our lives and threaten to diminish us - indeed, we never fully “get over” our grief - but they do not overwhelm or incapacitate us.

New orientation responds to the problem of evil. God ultimately reverses situations of distress and absence. These reversals remind us that God’s sovereignty is revealed in the restoration of the lost and broken.

Thanksgiving psalms celebrate the surprises of new orientation and God’s unexpected reversal of past disorientation. “Weeping may linger but joy comes with the morning” (Psalm 30). Thanksgiving psalms share the story of past pain as a catalyst for communal celebration.

STRUCTURE OF THE THANKSGIVING PSALM

A. Introduction - A declaration of thanks

Example: “I will extol you, O Lord” (Psalm 30:1-3)

B. Body - Tells the story of the past problem

Example: “To you, O LORD, I cried.” (Psalm 30:6-10)

C. Conclusion - A renewed declaration of thanks

Example: “I will give thanks to you forever.” (Psalm 30:11-12)

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Personal Reflection – Session 8: I'll Never be the Same Again

As you reflect on thanksgiving psalms, consider the following questions and be prepared to share your thoughts during class.

1. Where have you experienced God's new orientation in your life?
2. What were your reactions to that experience?
3. Where else in the Bible do we find this reversal from despair to praise?

Class Session 8: I'll Never be the Same Again

Opening Prayer

O Lord our God, we will give thanks to you forever. You have turned our mourning into dancing. O restorer of life, we will praise you in word and deed forever. Amen and Amen.

From Psalm 30

Focusing

In groups of 2 or 3, discuss the following question:

What do you most want to thank God for today?

Video

As you watch the video, take notes to answer the following questions:

1. What does the word *todah* mean?
2. What is true worship?
3. How is a thanksgiving psalm like a hymn of lament? How is it different?

Opening Prayer (2 minutes)

Either pray in unison or ask someone from the class to pray the prayer aloud while others pray silently.

Focusing (5 minutes)

Divide the class into small groups.

Ask the class to discuss the question at left ("What do you most want to thank God for today?").

Video (6:08 plus 10 minutes for discussion)

Before you start the video, ask participants to review the questions in the Participant's Guide and to jot answers to the questions as they view the video.

Since the first and third questions are somewhat technical, sample answers are provided below:

The Hebrew root of todah means to throw or cast. Todah can mean to set forth, recount, recite, make known to others.

They share an evangelical aspect of giving testimony about God. Both are addressed to God, to the congregation and to the world. The difference is that in the hymn, God is praised for God's

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Activity: Write Your Own

Think of a time in your life when you experienced a reversal of circumstances and moved from distress and pain to joy and thanksgiving.

Using the structure of the thanksgiving psalm found in the box on page 45, write your own thanksgiving psalm in a few sentences.

Share your thanksgiving with the larger group, if you are willing to do so.

Choose a hymn of thanksgiving from your church's hymnal (look in a topical index) to sing together.

nature in general terms. In the thanksgiving, God is praised more concretely for saving the psalmist.

Activity: Write Your Own **(20 minutes)**

Review the directions at left with the class. It also would be helpful to review the structure of thanksgiving psalms found on page 45 of the Participant's Guide (and as follows).

STRUCTURE OF THE THANKSGIVING PSALM

A. Introduction

A declaration of thanks

Example: "I will extol you, O Lord" (Psalm 30:1-3)

B. Body

Tells the story of the past problem

Example: "To you, O LORD, I cried." (Psalm 30:6-10)

C. Conclusion

A renewed declaration of thanks

Example: "I will give thanks to you forever." (Psalm 30:11-12)

Call the group back together and ask if anyone would like to share his or her thanksgiving psalm.

If time permits and if hymnals are available, you might sing a hymn of thanksgiving, as indicated at left.

Group Discussion

1. How is a thanksgiving psalm a psalm of new orientation?
2. What effects can thanksgiving psalms have on other people? Why is this important in the life of a Christian?
3. What place should thanksgiving psalms have in our worship services?

Alternative Activity: Psalm 8 (15-20 minutes)

Materials: Bibles, flipchart, markers

Have the participants break into small groups and separate the parts of the structure of Psalm 8 (as on p. 45 of the Participant's Guide). Each group should appoint a scribe to note its responses to share with the larger group.

Discuss these questions:

In what ways might we classify Psalm 8 as a psalm of new orientation?

What place does Psalm 8 give to human beings in creation?

What does it mean to be made "little less than God?" What does "dominion" mean?

Compare Psalm 8 to a hymn based upon it in the church hymnal. Which is the more powerful praise? Why?

Group Discussion (10 minutes)

Allow up to 10 minutes for discussion to help connect this week's material to participants' lives.

Use the questions in the Participant's Guide (at left) to start the discussion. If a question does not get a quick response, be patient. Allow participants to think during the silence before you introduce a different question.

Course Evaluation (10 minutes)

Prior to class, make sufficient copies of the course evaluation forms in the Appendix of this Leader's Guide. See pp. 6-7 above for more information.

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Conclusion and Closing Prayer

Concluding Exercise. Sit in a circle of chairs.

1. Share your most important learning from the course with your classmates.
2. Look at the definition of prayer you wrote at the beginning of the course (page 5). Would you change your definition in light of what you have learned over the past several weeks?

*Join hands for prayer (seated in the circle or standing in front of the chairs). Begin the prayer by thanking God for the honest sharing of views that has occurred. After each person who wishes to has prayed, conclude with "**And let the people say 'Amen!'**"*

Conclusion and Closing Prayer
(15 minutes)

It is helpful for participants to be given the chance to experience a formal conclusion to the course. In particular, it can be valuable for class members to share together about what they have learned over the past several weeks.

This exercise might require moving chairs and tables to allow students to sit in a circle. If this is required, a short break might be introduced here or prior to the Group Discussion to allow time to rearrange the room.

Other summary questions could be asked at this point, such as "What new questions has this course encouraged you to pursue?"

Review the instructions at left with the class. Once you've determined that everyone has prayed who wished to pray, lead the class in saying, "**And let the people say, 'Amen!'**"

APPENDIX

WESLEY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Journey Through the Psalms: COURSE EVALUATION BY FACILITATOR

Tell us what you think about (1) the topics and content the course covered, (2) how the course was organized, and (3) the materials provided for the course. Please feel free to use the back of this sheet for additional comments.

<p>1. What did you like MOST about teaching the course?</p>	
<p>2. What did you like the LEAST about teaching the course?</p>	
<p>3. What topics/chapters would you have liked to have had more time on? Did we miss anything?</p>	
<p>4. What course materials were most useful? Why? What materials were least useful and how could we improve them?</p>	
<p>5. How did you use the website during the class? What features were most useful?</p>	
<p>6. What could we do differently to improve the learning experience in future classes?</p>	
<p>7. Other comments, observations, suggestions:</p>	

WESLEY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Journey Through the Psalms: COURSE EVALUATION BY PARTICIPANT

Tell us what you think about (1) the topics and content the course covered, (2) how the course was organized / taught, and (3) the materials provided for the course. Please feel free to use the back of this sheet for additional comments.

1. What did you like MOST about the course? Why?	
2. What did you like the LEAST about the course? Why?	
3. What topics/chapters would you have liked to have had more time on? Did we miss anything?	
4. What course materials were most useful? Why? What materials were least useful? Why? How could we improve them?	
5. How did you use the website during the class? What features were most useful? Why?	
6. What could we do differently to improve your learning experience in future classes?	
7. What did you like MOST about HOW the subject matter was taught?	
8. What did you like LEAST about HOW the subject matter was taught? Why? What could we do differently?	
9. Other comments, observations, suggestions:	

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