



## Participant's Guide

An Adult Education Course  
From Wesley Ministry Network

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JOURNEY  
THROUGH THE  
PSALMS

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

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**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.



## **Class Session 1: Praying the Psalms**

### **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*

### **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?

### **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  
Psalm 1:6  
Psalm 23:1  
Psalm 30:2  
Psalm 32:5  
Psalm 147:1

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.*



**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?

**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.**

## *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*.

**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.

**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?

### **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.

**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.**

## **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



**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.

**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?

**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, above). 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.

**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?

**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.**

## 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?

**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.





## ***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?
  
6. 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**

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

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.**

## 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*.

**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.

**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?

**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?*

**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?



**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.**

## 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*.

**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.

**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?

### **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

For more information, see *Journey Through the Psalms*, pp. 105ff.

*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."**

### **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?

**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.**

## 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.





## ***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.

**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?

**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.**

## *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*.

**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)



## ***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?



**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.*

**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?

### **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!'**"*



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