

Praying the Psalms

Psalm 1 – Praying for Wisdom

The Psalms are poetry meant to be sung or recited regularly as devotional. They are a beautiful expression of the human experience while at the same time drawing us to a larger view of reality. Regular praying and singing the Psalms is transformative, helping us look at the world and ourselves differently, always drawing us back to God.

In Psalm 1 we find a contrast between two different lifestyles and we are encouraged to meditate on God's word day and night, expecting that we might do that individually and when we meet collectively as an assembly of believers.

For this Psalm we will do that using a loose version of the Lectio Divino method of meditation. With each reading have one person read the whole Psalm aloud and slowly. Try to listen as the Psalm is read rather than using your eyes to follow along. After each reading remain silent for 5-10 minutes to meditate/think about the passage before answering the questions.

Start by praying and asking the Holy Spirit to speak to you through this Psalm.

Read through Psalm 1.

1. What words or phrases has the Holy Spirit caused to stand out for you as the Psalm contrasts two ways of living?

Read through Psalm 1 again.

Watch the following short clip from the Bible Project:

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/psalm-1/>

2. What added understanding or thoughts stand out for you?
3. What lifestyle transformation is the Psalm encouraging us to nurture? By what means?

Read through Psalm 1 again.

4. What specific situations in your life does this Psalm relate to? How might you use Psalm 1 to pray?

Pray Together

Psalm 16 – Praying with Trust

1. Who do you trust? What do you trust in?

Read Psalm 16

2. Are you willing to call God 'my Lord' and trust him (Psalm 16: 1-2)? What does it look like in practice for you to trust God?

Explore together the statements below using Psalm 16. Then take 3-5 minutes of silence for personal reflection on the question that follows. You may want to share your answers with each other, but no-one should feel obliged to share. As you trust each other with your personal life anything shared should be kept in confidence and not go beyond the group.

Trusting God is exclusive. (Psalm 16: 1-4, 7-8)

3. Is your trust in God exclusive?

Trusting in God involves our entire person. (Psalm 16: 5-8, 11)

4. How does trusting God affect your life? Are there areas of your life you are holding back on trusting God with?

Trusting God is eternal. (Psalm 16: 9-11)

5. What are your doubts and fears for the future?

Pray Together

Praise God who is trustworthy. Support each other in prayer as you grow in trust in every area of your life.

Psalm 42 & 43 – Praying for Help

1. What are some of the tough experiences you or others around you have had in your life?

Read Psalm 42 & 43 together. They were originally written as one long Psalm.

Pour out your soul to God

2. What are some ways our culture deals with strong emotions? What words and images do we use today to describe our bad feelings? (Psalm 42: 1- 3, 6-7)
3. How did the psalmist feel? What does the psalmist do with his strong emotions?
4. What are the questions you want to ask God when you are feeling down? Does the psalmist find answers to his? Why do we ask these questions? (Psalm 42: 2, 3, 9; Psalm 43: 2)

Use self-talk to re-order your perspective and hope

Listen to Tim Keller – ‘Talking to Yourself, Not Listening to Yourself’. (8 min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZQQwAActog>

5. The psalmist talks to himself not God or others (Psalm 42: 5, 11; 43: 5). Have you ever tried self-talk to re-direct your attention and hope to God? What did you use, scripture, song or something else?

Pray for your situation and yourself

6. How does the Psalmist pray for his situation (Psalm 43:1) and for himself (Psalm 43:3)? How does the New Testament encourage us to pray for difficulties (Phil 4:6-7; I Pet 5:6-7)?

Pray Together

Take time to pray for each other in any difficult situations you are going through. Ask God to lead you in his light and faithful care.

Psalm 62 – Praying for Strength

1. Psalm 62 is a song for those under stress. Read the Psalm together. What songs does this Psalm bring to mind? You might like to search for songs based on Psalm 62 online.
2. In v11b the Psalmist says that God is strong. What does strength mean to you in times of stress? How does this Psalm illustrate God's strength available to us?
3. The Psalmist says that God alone is his rock and fortress (strength) v1-2, 5-6. What other ways do people try to find strength (See 62: 3-4 and 9-10)? What about today? Where do we try to find strength apart from God?
4. In v12a the Psalmist says that God is loving. How is God's love illustrated in this Psalm?
5. In 62:5-8 the Psalmist uses self-talk to encourage his faith. In practical terms how can we access God's strength and love for stressful situations we face? Notice how he uses pronouns to make his knowledge of God personal.
6. Try re-writing v5-8 for your own situation or for times that stress you. What would you say to yourself to find encouragement?

Pray Together

Use v5-8 as a prayer asking God to be your strength, helping you to rest in him, to trust him at all times and to pour out your heart to him. Praise God that he is our only real strength and his strength is sufficient for any situation.

Psalm 103 – Praying with Praise

Read Psalm 103 two or three times, in different versions if you have them. As you work through the following questions turn your sharing into prayer/praise.

Make praise a habit

1. Why don't we praise God? (See Ps 103:1-2; Deut 8:10-14)
2. How do you incorporate praise into your prayer life? How might you develop the habit of regular praise to God?

Praise God for what he has done

3. Make a list from Psalm 103 of praiseworthy things God has done for us.
4. Share three 'benefits' God has given you today that you praise God for.

Praise God for who he is

5. Make a list from Psalm 103 of the character of God that is worthy of praise. Keep going, adding to the list from your experience and knowledge of God.

Praise Together

Finish by listening to or singing together 'Praise my Soul the King of Heaven' or '10,000 Reasons' (both based on Psalm 103).

Psalm 138 – Praying with Praise & Thanksgiving

Read Psalm 138 together.

Praise is Personal

1. Notice the language used to express praise to God personally (Ps 138:1-3). Reflect on how personal praise impacts your relationship with God.
2. What does it mean to praise God ‘with all your heart’ (Ps 138:1)

Praise is Public

3. The psalmist praises God with other believers (138:2). How do you feel about corporate worship with other Christians? What distracts you from fully engaging in corporate praise?
4. The psalmist praise of God enlarges his vision with the expectation that the surrounding nations would join in praise to God (138:4-5). Discuss appropriate ways to live our lives in praise to God in the public situations you find yourself in today?

Praise is Persistent

5. The psalmist has written this psalm of praise while he is going through some significant trouble (138:7a). What does it take to keep praising God even while we are going through difficult experiences (138:6-8)?

Praise Together

Try writing your own psalm of praise or re-write Ps 138: 1-3 in words meaningful to you. Finish together praying these psalms to God.

Psalm 121 – Praying for Help

Read together Psalm 121 – this Psalm was sung by pilgrims as they ascended on their journey to Jerusalem for one of the festivals.

Source of Help (v1-2)

Read aloud Psalm 121:1-2 three times in different versions if you have them. Try to listen as the verses are read rather than using your eyes to follow along. After the reading remain silent for 5-10 minutes to meditate/think about the passage before answering the questions.

1. Where do you seek help from?
2. How do our own sources of help compare to God as helper? (vs1-2)

The God who watches over you (v3-8)

Again, read aloud Psalm 121:3-8 three times. After the reading remain silent for 5-10 minutes to meditate/think about the passage before answering the questions.

3. How confident can you be that God will help you?
4. What is the extent of his help?

Bad Stuff Happens

5. Psalm 121 doesn't address the question of why bad stuff happens to us. What other Psalms and scriptures come to mind that do help us put this Psalm in the context of real life? (e.g. Rom 8: 35-29)
6. Read responsively this section from the Heidelberg Catechism written in the 16th Century. Do you believe that in your present circumstances?

Leader:

What do you believe when you say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth"?

Group answer:

*That I so trust as to have no doubt that He will provide me
with all things necessary for body and soul;
and further, that whatever evil He sends upon me in this valley of tears,
He will turn to my good;
for He is able to do it, being Almighty God, and willing also, being a faithful Father.
So, We are to be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity,
and for what is future have good confidence in our faithful God and Father,
that no creature shall separate us from His love*

Pray Together

Ask God for help in your present circumstances, not just the bad stuff you may be experiencing.