

THE PSALMS: Prayers of the Heart



Growth Groups
Winter 2021



THE PSALMS: Prayers of the Heart

Session Outline Winter 2021

January 26..... Psalm 1: Praying Our Inattention
February 2..... Psalm 2: Praying Our Intimidation
February 9..... Psalm 3: Praying Our Trouble
February 16..... Psalm 8: Praying Our Creation
February 23..... Psalm 51: Praying Our Sin
March 2..... Psalm 103: Praying Our Salvation
March 9..... Psalm 23: Praying Our Fear
March 16..... Psalm 137: Praying Our Hate
March 23..... Psalm 6: Praying Our Tears
March 30..... *[OFF FOR SPRING BREAK]*
April 6..... Psalm 73: Praying Our Doubt
April 13..... Psalm 90: Praying Our Death
April 20..... Psalm 150: Praying Our Praise

Study adapted from Eugene H. Peterson, LifeGuide Bible Studies

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

January 26: Praying Our Inattention — Psalm 1

1. What thoughts and concerns most often distract you when you begin to pray?
2. What contrasts do you notice in this psalm?
3. The psalmist describes the person who delights in God's law (v. 2). What is your emotional response to Scripture — not what you *believe* about it but how you honestly *feel* about it? (e.g. bewildered, skeptical, trusting, curious, etc)
4. A tree is the central metaphor of the psalm (v. 3). Put your imagination to use. How are law-delighting people like trees?
5. In what ways are the wicked like chaff (vv 4-6)?
6. How do these two radically different portraits (the tree/righteous and the chaff/wicked) motivate you to delight in God's word?
7. Do you feel a gap between your "real life" (work, school, family) and your prayer life? Explain.
8. How can meditation prepare us for prayer?
9. In order to prepare for prayer, what method might you want to try to move from inattention to attention?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

February 2: Praying Our Intimidation— Psalm 2

1. Think about today's news headlines. What events in the world are particularly troubling you, and why?
2. What key nouns and verbs throughout the passage suggest the political orientation of this psalm?
3. Do you feel responsible to pray for the nation, society and culture as you do for self, friends and church? Explain.
4. How does the Lord view the vaunted power of the nations (vv. 4-6)? How does this compare to or contrast with your attitude as you watch or read today's news headlines?
5. The psalm begins and ends with references to kings and rules (vv. 2-3, 10-12). How do they relate to the King enthroned by the Lord (v. 6)?
6. And what impact does this have on the way we pray?
7. It is always easier to pray for personal needs than political situations. But Psalm 2 is entirely political. Knowing this, what responsibility do we have as citizens of a particular country living in Christ's kingdom?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

February 9: Praying Our Trouble— Psalm 3

1. What is the worst trouble you were in this last week? Where did you go for help? Did you get help?
2. David describes his foes in verses 1-2. Do you ever feel overwhelmed by threatening people or circumstances? Give an example.
3. What actions is God described as taking in this psalm? Are you used to thinking of God in these ways?
4. What actions is David described as taking in the psalm? To what extent do these characterize you when trouble arises?
5. What is troubling you right now? What in this psalm will help you to pray your trouble? This week, take an image or phrase from Psalm 3 and use it to pray your trouble.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

February 16: Praying Our Creation— Psalm 8

1. Browse through the psalm and note every word that refers to what God has created. How do these things reveal God's glory?
2. How does Psalm 8 compare with the way you view yourself?
3. Why do you think the psalmist contrasts what children and infants say with what foes and avengers say in verse 2?
4. What evidence do we have that God cares for us?
5. Verse 5 comments on our *position* in creation. How does it contrast with positions we are put in by non-biblical authorities?
6. Verse 6 comments on our *responsibility* over creation. In what ways do you feel or not feel responsibility for your environment?
7. The psalm lists six creatures (vv. 7-8) over which we have responsibility. Name six other things over which you accept responsibility.
8. "Ruler" and "under his feet" (v. 6) can be twisted into excuses to exploit and pillage. What is there in this psalm to prevent such twisting?
9. What adjustments do you need to make to view yourself as God views you?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

February 23: Praying Our Sin— Psalm 51

1. “Sin” has become an unpopular and little-used word in our culture. Why do you think this is?
2. How honest are you about your sin? Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10. Why do you rate yourself this way?
3. How many different synonyms for sin are in David’s prayer?
4. As Christians, we know we are sinful. Why then is it so painful to be confronted with a specific sin?
5. What is God asked to do about sin? (Count and name the verbs.)
6. Verse 10 is the center sentence. How does it center the prayer?
7. Forgiveness is an internal action with external consequences. What are some of them (vv. 13-17)?
8. What do you understand a “broken and contrite heart” to be (v. 17)? And what is your experience of this condition?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

March 2: Praying Our Salvation— Psalm 103

1. What are your general impressions of this psalm?
2. Note the first and last sentences. How does this bracketing affect your understanding of the psalm's contents?
3. How did God make his ways known to Moses and Israel (v. 7)?
4. What astounding statements about God does the psalmist make in verses 8-14?
5. Which ones in particular resonate with you and expand your understanding of God?
6. Carefully observe the contrast between us (vv. 15-16) and God (vv. 17-19). Does this make you feel better or worse about yourself? Explain.
7. What does it mean for you to be saved?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

March 9: Praying Our Fear— Psalm 23

1. What is your recurring fear(s)? What is its root? How would you like God to deal with it?
2. This is a well-known Psalm that you're probably familiar with. What did you learn today that you never noticed before?
3. There are two metaphors in the psalm: the shepherd (vv.1-4) and the host (vv. 5-6). Compare and contrast these two images.
4. Look carefully at the shepherd. How exactly does he care for his sheep (vv. 1-4)?
5. How does the setting of verse 4 contrast with that of verses 1-3?
6. "I fear no evil" (v.4) is a bold statement. What does it mean for you to say that?
7. Look carefully at the host (v. 5-6). How exactly does he provide for his guest?
8. How many times does the first-person pronoun (I, me, my) occur in this psalm? What impact does this make on you?
9. What is the most comforting thing you have experienced in the life of faith?
10. Psalm 23 is a weapon against fear. What fear in your life will you go to war against with this prayer as your cannon?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

March 16: Praying Our Hate— Psalm 137

1. Everyone has hated at one time or another. Be honest. Whom have you hated? Share if you feel comfortable.
2. How do you feel about yourself, your life and others when you experience hate?
3. Remembering your own experiences, how would you evaluate the emotions described in verses 4-6?
4. It is easy to be honest before God with our hallelujahs and in our hurt; it is not easy to be honest in the dark emotion of our hate. How honest are you about these things, to yourself and to God?
5. Jesus said, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 6:44). How can we possibly love and pray for such people?
6. The two dominant emotions in this prayer are self-pity (vv. 1-6) and avenging hate (vv. 7-9). Neither of them are particularly commendable. Praying our sins doesn’t launder them. What does it do?
7. Most of us suppress our negative emotions. The way to authentic prayer is not to cover them up so we appear respectable but to expose them so we can be healed. What negative emotion would you like healed? This week, pray your hate and other strong emotions to the God who knows your thoughts.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

March 23: Praying Our Tears— Psalm 6

1. When was the last time you cried — *really cried*? Share if you feel comfortable. Think about the source of your tears. Some weeping is selfish, from not getting our way. Some weeping is compassionate, a deep feeling for the suffering of others. Some weeping is from loss. Don't be critical for now, just keep it in mind for later development.
2. What different emotions are expressed in this psalm?
3. It is not popular in our culture to talk of an angry God (v.1). What experience have you had of God's anger?
4. Compare the first verse with the last. Are David's tears because of the Lord or because of the enemies? Explain.
5. "How long?" (v. 3) is a frequent question in prayer. Given the frequency with which it is uttered in Scripture, God must welcome the question. What in your life, past or present, evokes this question?
6. What is the cumulative effect of the the verbs *turn*, *deliver* and *save* in verse 4?
7. The emotional center of this prayer is verse 6-7. How many different ways is weeping expressed?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

April 6: Praying Our Doubt— Psalm 73

1. What doubts have you had or do you have about the Christian life? Do you feel guilty about expressing such doubts? Why? Share if you feel comfortable.
2. How would you paraphrase the doubt expressed in verses 2-12?
3. The questions the psalmist asks are very relevant to us. What individuals or groups of people cause you to ask these kinds of questions?
4. Self-pity is like a deadly virus. How would you express, in terms of your own life, what the psalmist says in verses 12-14?
5. There is a dramatic pivot in v. 17 when the psalmist says, “till I entered the sanctuary of God.” What takes place in your sanctuary, the place where you worship?
6. Appearances are often deceiving. How do you discern between what you see (in the physical world) and what is eternal (in the spiritual world)? Is that a struggle for you?
7. Worship is the pivotal act in this prayer. How can worship help you to deal with your doubts and hard questions about the Christian life?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

April 13: Praying Our Death— Psalm 90

1. When you think about your own death, what do you think about? What do you feel?
2. What different pictures of God do you get throughout this passage?
3. Death sets a limit to our lives and stimulates reflection on the context of life, which is not death, but God. In verses 1-2, how does the psalmist set death within his view of God?
4. How does the knowledge of your mortality affect the way you live your life?
5. How does the psalmist describe God's anger and its effects on our lives (vv. 7-11)?
6. The "anger" of God requires interpretation. How do you integrate this view of God with John's well-known statement "God is love"?
7. Luther commented on verse 12: "Lord, teach us all to be such arithmeticians!" What does it mean to number our days aright?
8. What are the key things you want others to notice in your life? What are the key character qualities or values that you would like to live out?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

April 20: Praying Our Praise— Psalm 150

1. Psalm 150 is deliberately placed as the concluding prayer of the church's book of prayers. How many times is the word *praise* used in this psalm?
2. When have you felt compelled to express your praise to God in a similar way?
3. Verse 2 tells us why God is to be praised. What reasons does the psalmist give? What reasons of your own can you add?
4. Verses 3-5 tell us *how* to praise the Lord. As you read these verses, what kind of scene do you imagine? How does this kind of worship compare with your own?
5. In Hebrew, the first and last word of this prayer is *hallelujah* ("praise the Lord.") To what extent are your prayers bracketed by this word?
6. There are no shortcuts to praise. If we read all the psalms preceding this one (lament, compassion, vengeance, etc) we will notice all the tears and doubts and pain that are eventually summed up into praise. What difficult circumstances in your life have eventually found their way into praise? (It may take many years before one of these prayers "arrive" at Psalm 150).